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SIX
FINGERS
by
VERA
KELSEY

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THE
PRIVATE
EYE
by
CLEVE F.
ADAMS

No. 29
NOVEMBER

SATAN *has* SIX FINGERS

By
VERA KELSEY

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TWO COMPLETE CURRENT DETECTIVE BOOKS

The Private Eye

by CLEVE F. ADAMS



Two Complete **DETECTIVE BOOKS**

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THE PRIVATE EYE

By **CLEVE F. ADAMS**

Take a tough mining town and two copper magnates who are mixing murder with mining. Add an odd assortment of grafters, shady police, oily politicians, patriotic Poles, and slick stock market riggers. Sprinkle with a few bullets and a handful of dynamite. Spice with Mexican nightclub entertainers and smart dames who know, even as the original Eve, the purpose for which an apple was designed. Stir vigorously. Serve up to John J. Shannon, detective extraordinary for those who need the services of a private eye sharp enough to penetrate a tank.

The result? As the glamorous Miss Frances McGowan expresses it in the last paragraph of this book: "It's all a part of the great Shannon tradition. Never a dull moment." *Copyrighted, 1942, by Cleve F. Adams. Regular edition, \$2.00.*

SATAN HAS SIX FINGERS

By **VERA KELSEY**

From the moment when Penelope Paget saw the slumped figure in the empty subway train at midnight to the last crashing climax in a drawing room in Rio de Janeiro, she was caught up in a mass of cross currents, misstatements of fact, and bewildering emotional reactions. She had to undertake the delivery to Rio of a small clay elephant, which she concealed in a turban wound around her head. Once arrived in Rio, she found herself sought after by people she had never seen before and almost deliberately kept in the dark by people she thought she knew very well. She heard the legend of Satan's Sixth Finger and she saw a dead man whose body mysteriously disappeared only to be traced by scientific research in a glass factory. A novel with an authentic Brazilian background, written by an authority on our South American neighbor. *Copyrighted, 1943, by Vera Kelsey. Regular edition, \$2.00.*

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**THE NEXT ISSUE OF TWO COMPLETE DETECTIVE BOOKS WILL BE ON
SALE AT THE NEWSSTANDS ON NOVEMBER 1st, 1944**

THE PRIVATE EYE

By CLEVE F. ADAMS



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THE name had a certain forthright sound to it, even from such lovely lips as those of Miss Frances McGowan. "John J. Shannon," she read, pretending that it was very difficult because of the reversed lettering on the ground glass door. And then, even more slowly and enunciating each syllable with obvious relish: "De-tect-ive A-gen-cy." Miss McGowan had but recently come through the door, and had she not known it by heart anyway she could much more easily have read the inscription from the outside, only there would have been no point in this. It would not have annoyed Shannon.

He lifted outraged eyes from Gus Vogel's telegram. "Damn it, Fran—"

She was horrified. "Oooh, what you said!"

"You've heard worse," he growled. He had a thick shock of dark hair, and very dark eyes under straight black brows, and a big nose and a fair share of chin. He would lead you to believe. The mouth was as fine and sensitive as a woman's. He returned to the wire: "Unable work here. Kronjager—remember him—on cops. Come home?" Shannon hurled the telegram from him. "The lousy square-head!"

Frances picked up the flimsy. "Who—Kronjager?"

"No," Shannon yelled, "Vogel!"

Miss McGowan's exquisite lips made disparaging sounds. "Poor Gussie. I always rather liked Gus."

Shannon regarded her without any visible sign of affection, and this was quite odd, for she was a very lovely young lady indeed. Talented, too. Besides modeling seventeen-thousand dollar mink coats and one thing and another for the more exclusive Los Angeles salons, she wrote and, surprisingly, sold detective stories. It was this last activity which

had first brought her into contact with John J. Shannon, then a detective-lieutenant on the cops. As a matter of fact, it was she who was responsible for his leaving the cops and going into business for himself. What with two distinct and remunerative trades she was making infinitely more money than an ungrateful city was willing to pay its detective-lieutenants, a condition intolerable to any man, but especially so to a man named John J. Shannon. He frowned. "Well, I suppose I'll have to go up there myself."

"Up where?"

"Las Cruces." He thrust his chair violently backward and yelled at the partially open door which led to the tiny anteroom. "Mamie, find out when I can get a plane to Phoenix!"

Mamie's voice, slightly tinged with sarcasm, wondered what was the matter with his own telephone. He ignored that and tried once more to concentrate on the problem of Gus Vogel. "I don't know what I see in the guy," he remarked presently.

"I do," Miss McGowan said.

Shannon appeared surprised. "You do?"

She nodded. Her brown eyes were uncomfortably direct. "Among other things, he inflates your ego."

A slow flush crept up around Shannon's ears. "That's a hell of a thing to say."

"But true," Frances pointed out. She was in a beige wool suit, and her hat was not as ridiculous as some. The late afternoon sun turned her hair the color of champagne. "While you were together on the cops his mistakes made you look super-smart by comparison." She became entranced with her own powers of analysis. "When he got kicked off you gave him a job so that you could go on looking super-smart."

Shannon was cut to the quick. "A fine thing." He was impelled to admit, though



Shannon

not to Frances, that there might be some truth in the accusation. He would not have admitted, even to himself, that he liked the guy. "And anyway," he announced triumphantly, "he did get kicked off. The minute I wasn't around to prop him up he fell down."

Miss McGowan was not one to shirk an argument. "Of course. He got in the habit of leaning on you. Left to himself, Gus is as smart as the next one."

Shannon, remembering Vogel's telegram, was indignant. "That's what you think." He pointed a shaking finger. "I send him up to Las Cruces on a simple little job and what does he do? He runs into somebody that recognizes him and he wants to come home!"

A speculative gleam came into Fran's eyes. "Just what is this simple little job?"

"Nothing that would interest you," Shannon said. He pretended to be very busy re-reading the telegram. "Some gal's husband got shot and the cops told her it was suicide, only she doesn't think so."

Frances was incredulous. "And you sent Vogel?"

"Why not?" Shannon demanded.

Unerring logic was one of Miss McGowan's more irritating attributes. "Well,

you just got through telling me how dumb he is." She appeared to become lost in thought. "You wouldn't by any chance have known this girl before, would you?"

"Certainly not," Shannon said stiffly.

"Then how did she happen to pick on you?"

SHANNON was trapped and he knew it. His agency was not so large, nor so famous, that a total stranger in Las Cruces, Arizona, would have settled on his name in, say, the Los Angeles phone directory. Besides, Phoenix was some four hundred miles closer. "Well—" He was suddenly and terrifically angry. "All right, then I did know her!"

"And now she's a widow," Fran said. Her voice had a certain inexorable quality. "Perhaps even an attractive widow?"

Shannon wouldn't look at her. "All right, I sent Vogel, didn't I?" It occurred to him that the question was peculiarly unfortunate. It, and the fact that he had sent Vogel instead of going himself, implied a former association with Wynn Thorelsen which he would rather not renew—personally. In desperation he offered the age-old excuse of errant husbands: "Look, Mrs. Thorelsen is just an old friend."

"You don't have to explain to me," Fran said sweetly. "I'm not your wife, you know."

"Mrs. Thorelsen is a hell of a nice girl, and she was crazy about her husband." Some of his customary arrogance returned to him. "Not only that, if she says there is something screwy about the way he died, then something is screwy." He considered having another drink but decided against it. He put the bottle away. "Besides, she's got ten thousand dollars to spend." His mouth got a stubborn look about it. "Besides, I don't like a bunch of small-town cops telling me what I can and can not do."

Frances regarded him. "It wasn't you they told. It was Gus Vogel."

He scowled. "It's the same thing, isn't it?"

Mamie Costello came in from the ante-room. She was a pert red-headed girl with freckles on her nose. "You can get a Phoenix plane at nine o'clock." Her eyes appraised Miss McGowan's skunk

coat draped carelessly over a chair. "I wish I could get my clothes at forty per cent off."

"I wish you could too, dear," Frances said. Her tone implied that in order to do so Mamie would first have to get a better-looking body; one that Richlander & Fink, for instance, thought worthy of displaying their merchandise.

"Don't you hate yourself?" Mamie said. She addressed her employer. "Well, shall I make the reservation or not?"

Shannon glared at her. "What do you think I asked you to call up for?"

Mamie assumed an air of outraged dignity. "I don't know, Lieutenant."

"How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that?"

"Well, you still act like a cop," Mamie said. She went out, banging the door. A sort of oppressive silence settled on the room. Miss McGowan found and lit a cigarette. "So you're going?"

The telephone rang. Shannon picked it up. "Yes?"

It turned out to be Gus Vogel, calling long distance from Las Cruces. His voice sounded funny. "Is that you, John J.?"

Shannon's eyes got a watchful, cagy look in them. "What's the matter with you?"

"A couple of guys claimed they didn't like my face," Vogel said. He coughed apologetically. "They tried to remodel it."

Shannon drew an unsteady breath. "Cops?"

"No," Vogel said. He began to talk very fast. "Look, I was in a place having a beer, see, and minding my own business, like I always try to do, John J., and these two guys just came in and got tough." He became apologetic again. "This whole town is tough, John J. I been here less than seven hours and I already seen half a dozen fights and two killings." There was a sound as though he might be sucking at a cut lip. "I think Mrs. Thorelsen has got something but I'm afraid to go near her."

"You talk to her?"

"Only over the phone," Vogel said. He sighed. "This guy Kronjager recognized me when I came in on the bus and I thought that— Look, John J., I wouldn't be any good to you dead, would I?"

Shannon cursed him. "We might try it. You certainly aren't any good to me alive." After a moment's reflection he said, "All right, find yourself some nice quiet hole and crawl into it till I get there." He closed his eyes, calculating distances. "I ought to make it by midnight." He disconnected.

Miss McGowan was applying fresh lipstick to her mouth and regarding her reflection searchingly in the compact mirror. "I could go with you," she offered casually. "Sort of relieve the tedium of the journey."

Shannon was heavily sarcastic. "I'm sure it would, darling." He stood up violently. "But after this last hour a little tedium would be a pleasure!"

II

THE bus labored doggedly up the grade, second gear an irritating, monotonous whine. Against the blackness of the night it was a giant luminous bug; the beams of its headlights were antennae, probing each climbing turn and rocky abutment, testing the future with a caution born of the past.

Inside the bus it was stifling. Because of the rain the windows were closed, and the ventilators let in only enough cool moist air to accentuate the reek of sweating hunkies and the even more nauseous smell of perfume and powder and cigarette smoke from the three girls up behind the driver.

A thin woman in a Salvation Army bonnet sat squarely in the middle of a seat meant for two and stared uncompromisingly straight ahead. Directly opposite Shannon was a great golden-haired man in a vociferous plaid suit. He too sat squarely in the middle of the seat, though not because he feared companionship. His size made it necessary. He was the largest man Shannon had ever seen. Occasionally he would pry his bulk out of the seat and go back along the swaying aisle, admonishing the more obstreperous of the hunkies to silence. His eyes, meeting Shannon's, were as naive and friendly as a child's. Shannon hoped that the big man would never find cause to dislike him, Shannon. On one of the occasions when their glances crossed, the

giant grinned hugely, exposing a perfect galaxy of goldfilled teeth. "You not afraid from Pilsudski?"

"No," Shannon said.

Pilsudski nodded. "Iss good." It was obvious that he knew Shannon's denial was a lie, but that he bore no hard feelings because of that. He began to hum to himself, not unmusically, something from Tchaikowsky's Fifth Symphony.

The bus lurched around a turn and began a sharp descent, accelerating slightly, though the driver did not shift gears. Giant tires sucked greedily at the wet pavement. Rain beat on the roof like buckshot.

Presently the bus lifted its nose and began another seemingly interminable climb. Shannon got up and went back to the tiny lavatory at the tail end, banged the door closed, banged the window up and breathed deep of the sodden night. In spite of the rain, the air was thin and very cold. He leaned on the sill and discovered that there was nothing between him and a yawning cloud-filled chasm but a narrow stretch of pavement and a diagonally striped guard rail. He was seized with a sudden chill, not entirely of the night. He hoped the bus driver knew what he was doing. He banged the window shut, intending to once more brave the smells of his fellow passengers in preference to teetering there on the verge of eternity. He actually had the door half open when the right front tire went out.

The sound of it was terrific. It was still echoing in the air when the bus lurched drunkenly and went into a sickening, top-heavy spin. There was a splintering crash as the rear end hit some temporary obstruction. Shannon was flung sprawling into the aisle.

It seemed to him that all hell broke loose then.

WOMEN screamed and men shouted and some of them fell out of their seats on top of Shannon as the bus tried to stand on its tail, failed, and went skidding sideways down a short steep declivity. A booted foot ground Shannon's face into the shuddering floor.

It was the giant Pilsudski's voice which finally rose transcendent above all the

others. Horrific Polish oaths rolled and echoed inside the now stationary bus. "Whatsa matter? You not hurt!"

Some of the crushing weight was lifted from Shannon's back. He looked up to find that for this he was indebted to Pilsudski. The big man was hauling scared hunkies out of the aisle and slamming them into their seats with the practised ease of a farmer stacking cordwood. Shannon got somewhat groggily to his feet. "Well, thanks," he croaked. One whole side of his face felt as though it were frozen solid.

"Sure," Pilsudski said. His golden, toothy smile was like a benediction. He turned his broad back and addressed the driver. "Whatsa matter you, Rogalli, you lose the nerve?"

Shannon saw that Rogalli was bleeding from a deep gash slanting down across his nose and under one eye. He wiped at the blood with the back of a hand. "I didn't do so bad."

The three girls were huddled together in one seat. The paint stood out on their faces like chunks of roselaque on an otherwise blank canvas. The Salvation Army lady's eyes were shut tightly. Her lips moved as though she might be praying, though no sound came out. The score or so hunkies muttered sullenly among themselves. Glass from the shattered windshield crunched under the driver's feet. He turned and yanked at the lever controlling the doors.



Pilsudski

There was a concerted rush for the doors. Shannon, debouching presently, discovered that it had stopped raining. The bus windows made pools of yellow light on the highway. The air was clean and sharp and very cold. He saw that the whole front end of the great bus was accordion-pleated and seemingly intent on burying itself in a giant outcropping of rock which hung poised on the edge of what appeared to be a mile-deep gorge. Mist rolled and boiled in the chasm. Shannon licked his lips, pointing. "How far down?"

"Two-three thousan' feet," Pilsudski said. He regarded his chattering charges with a kind of affectionate paternalism. "You lucky," he said. He bent an approving eye on Shannon. "You lucky too."

Shannon drew a deep breath. "You're telling me." He watched one of the girls sop a handkerchief in the rain water caught in a depression of the big rock. She was washing the blood from Rogalli's face. "Every hour, every single minute that I get from now on is strictly gravy."

The Salvation Army lady rose bravely to the occasion. It was she who ripped strips from her white petticoat to make a bandage for the bus driver's face. It developed that she was the only one of the four women who wore a petticoat.

Pilsudski went over and looked at the blown front tire. Shannon became conscious that there was something curious about the way the big man squatted there, his absolute immobility. Shannon went over too. The tire was flattened at the base of the wheel, from the weight of the bus, but elsewhere it was normally round. There was a neat, a very perfect hole in the casing. It was about the size of a nickel and it went clear through and disclosed another hole, slightly larger, in the opposite sidewall. Shannon was afraid he was going to become violently sick at his stomach.

Pilsudski stood up. His blue eyes were no longer naive. There was something terrible in them, and the golden, toothy smile had become a fixed grimace.

Sudden sweat broke out under Shannon's arms and turned to ice on his ribs. "Who?"

Pilsudski looked at him as though see-

ing him for the first time. "How should I knowing?" He turned and began a swift scrabbling ascent of the cut bank rising steeply from the road. Presently darkness and the mountains swallowed him.

A CAR, coming very fast from the direction of Phoenix, rounded the nearest turn. Its headlights bathed Shannon and the bus and the rest of them with white-hot light. or a moment it seemed that the car was not going to stop. Then there was the shriek of suddenly applied brakes, the scream of tortured rubber and the car skidded to an abrupt halt. It was a Cadillac Sixteen, very red, very shiny, very expensive looking. There was a woman at the wheel. There were no other passengers. She leaned out of the left-hand window and, probably because he was closest, addressed Shannon. "Trouble?"

She was just about the most vivid thing he had seen in years. She was without a hat, and her slightly windblown hair was as black and shiny as jet. It was so dark that it seemed to hold indigo-blue as straight and black as Shannon's own probed his face. Her full red mouth was arrogant.

Shannon waved at the bus. "I'll leave it to you. Does that look like trouble?"

The bus driver came over. He seemed curiously diffident compared with his former manner. "Hello, Miss MacLeish." He corrected even that. "I mean, Mrs. St. Cyr."

"MacLeish will do," the vivid lady said. She looked at the hunkies, at the three girls, at the Salvation Army lassie. "What happened?"

Apparently Pilsudski's inspection of the tire had not been lost on the driver. "Somebody took a shot at us." He gagged suddenly. "With a rifle."

Shannon felt that he should add something to this. He waved at the mountain-side. "A guy named Pilsudski is up there looking for the marksman. He probably won't find anything."

The lady's green eyes examined him as though he were a bug under a microscope. He wondered what it would be like to crush his mouth against her full red lips. She deliberately removed her eyes from

his and again spoke to the driver. "So His Honor was riding with you?"

He looked at his feet. "Unh-hunh."

Pilsudski came sliding noisily down the cut bank. His once resplendent plaid suit was caked with mud, though the ridiculous green hat with the little red feather in the band had escaped tarnish. He politely bared his head for the girl's benefit. "Hi, MacLeish."

"Hello, Mayor," Miss MacLeish nodded. There was mockery in her eyes when she looked at Shannon. "Mr. Pilsudski is mayor of our homey little town up ahead."

"No!"

"Fact," she said, and for the first time since her arrival she smiled. The smile had a degree of intimacy that gave Shannon goose pimples. She turned an exact duplicate of the smile on the giant Pilsudski. "Find anything up there?"

"Road," Pilsudski said. "The old one." He explained for Shannon's edification that the new road, the one they were on, cut off some five or six miles. The muddy toe of his shoe drew a diagram on the wet pavement. "Shesa could gone back to Phoenix or Las Cruces, either wan." Obviously he meant the potential mass murderer. He lifted his gaze quite suddenly to the girl's face. "You been pass anybody going other way?"

She shook her head. "Not in the last half hour."

Pilsudski nodded. "Then is in Las Cruces," he said. There was that in the way he said it which boded little or no good for the rifleman when Pilsudski found him.

Shannon remembered that he too had been on the bus. "Well, somebody is going to have to get a relief bus—and the cops."

"Yess," Pilsudski said. He looked at the girl in the sleek red convertible. "You telling Whitey and those bus office?"

"All right." She gunned the motor into a throaty roar.

"Wait a minute," Shannon said. He looked at his watch. It was almost twelve. "I'm supposed to be in Las Cruces at midnight. Could I ride in with you?"

"Well—"

"The cops can find me later if they need me," he said.

She regarded him with an intentness

that was a little disconcerting. "You seem to know a great deal about policemen."

"Oh, I do," he assured her. "I've been in practically every jail in the country."

Pilsudski turned from a somewhat blasphemous harangue of the restless hunkies. "Iss all right, MacLeish. He no hurt you."

"I had no idea he would," Miss MacLeish said. She waited while Shannon got his hat and topcoat from the bus. He climbed into the Cadillac. In something less than a hundred feet they were doing sixty. Shannon closed his eyes against the picture of himself and a very gorgeous, very reckless young lady, and a big red Cadillac missing the next turn.

He was relieved to note that the turns were becoming less and less abrupt, for the lady showed no signs of slackening her headlong pace. As far as she was concerned, the Cadillac people could just as well have left off the brake pedal. Storm-ridden clouds still blacked out the higher peaks, but it had not yet begun to rain again. "There seemed to be some question in Rogalli's mind as to your right name," Shannon said. He was always very careful about possible husbands in the offing. "Is it Miss MacLeish or Mrs. St. Cyr?"

Her eyes rested on him obliquely. "Would you mind very much if it was Mrs.?"

He shrugged. "Probably not."

"Then it isn't," she said. "Legally, perhaps, but not in fact. I divorced St. Cyr a year ago." Almost unconsciously she increased the speed of the car. "No, that isn't quite true. It was George who divorced me." She gave Shannon a full view of her face this time. "He was my second."

Shannon licked his lips. "You certainly get around baby."

"It's probably the climate," she said. Her tone had a note of self-mockery. "You'll understand what I mean if you're around Las Cruces very long." She pointed ahead. In the distance and still far below them a long narrow valley was opening out. The town was a sprawling maze of red and blue neon, petering out toward the ends in queues of yellow street lights. And on the left, high above the town, were serrated rows of pinpoints, probably from the mine buildings. A

blood-red glow against the low-hanging clouds suggested fires from the converters of a giant smelter. "By the way," Miss MacLeish said, "I don't know your right name either."

He pretended to be very busy lighting a cigarette. "How about Shannon?"

She considered that. "Well," she decided presently, "it fits, anyway." She nodded to herself. "Yes, outside of a possible McGonigle I can't think of a better one."

They were actually down on the floor of the valley now. High up the slope immediately opposite them was a brightly lit sign which read: "Resurrection Copper Company." Shannon shuddered. "There's one name I don't like. It's unpleasantly suggestive." He thought that but for the bus driver Rogalli, he, John J. Shannon, might this very moment be lying down in the bottom of a mile-deep chasm, waiting for that other and final resurrection.

"Giles likes it," Miss MacLeish said.

Shannon half turned in his seat. "Giles?"

"My father," the green-eyed lady explained. She laughed throatily. "He runs the Resurrection."

Shannon regarded her. "I wish you'd quit saying that. It gives me goose pimples." He let his outstretched arm rest on the back of the seat, not touching her, but near enough so that he could if he wanted to. "Like you."

The main street of the town engulfed them. Shannon discovered what he had heretofore only suspected. There were at least eight saloons to the block, and all were doing a thriving business. The sidewalks were crowded, and half a hundred juke boxes spewed music into the street from behind constantly swinging doors. On a corner a Salvation Army band fought valiantly against this bedlam, but it was a losing battle. You couldn't even hear the bass drum. Cars were thick at the curbs, and such drivers as were actually abroad were apparently as careless of life, and limb as Shannon's own charioteer. The Cadillac halted abruptly before a six-story brick building advertised as the Hotel Navarro.

"You'll probably be stopping here," the lady said. "It's the best we've got."

"Yes," Shannon said. He was suddenly conscious of an intense desire to throttle his companion. It was not that her manner had changed, nor that she was any less beautiful. It was just that his hand, falling from the seat-back to the sunken ledge behind it, had come in contact with an odd-shaped leather case. Practised fingers told him that the case could contain but one object. It was a rifle.

III

VOGEL came into Shannon's room with the furtive, slightly apologetic air of the typical private eye—the kind that has given the profession a bad name. He was a round-bellied little Dutchman with naive blue eyes set like unhappy marbles in a pinkly cherubic face. One of the eyes had a mouse under it, and his small, Cupid's-bow mouth was a trifle puffy. "Hello, John J." He sucked in his breath. "I'm glad to see you!"

Shannon glared at him. "All right, so you're a private eye. You don't have to look like one."

Vogel took off his hat, looked in it, found nothing of value and put it back on again. "I—now—saw your name on the register."

Shannon admired him elaborately. "Now that's what I call genius. Who'd ever think of looking for a name on a hotel register?"

"Well, but—"

"Never mind," Shannon said. He was busy unpacking the luggage which had come in on the relief bus. "What about Mrs. Thorelsen?"

Vogel gingerly sat on the edge of the bed. "She was disappointed in you, John J." He thought about that for a moment. "On account of you didn't come yourself."

"Naturally," Shannon said with becoming modesty. "But aside from preferring me to you, what did she have to say?"

Vogel was hurt. "She said the same thing she did in her letter. She said her husband never committed suicide, and she knew he didn't, no matter what the cops told her."

"What did the cops tell her?"

"Well," Vogel said carefully, as though reciting by rote, "they said they found

him in his laboratory, and it was his own gun, and Whitey Loop—that's the chief of police here—got Wolfgang Rygaard—that's the big shot up at Las Cruces Consolidated—to admit he couldn't find all the dough this Bill Thorelsen was supposed to have charge of." Vogel turned brick red. "Also, there was some talk of a woman he was supposed to be running around with, and when Mrs. Thorelsen give 'em an argument they even brought her the woman."

"And what did Mrs. Thorelsen say to that?"

Vogel sighed. "That she knew her husband." He screwed up his eyes and it was obvious that he was quoting from memory. "'I knew Bill,' she says."

Shannon wished some woman would have that much faith in him. "A hell of a lot of help that is." He considered the weight of evidence against what he knew of Wynn Thorelsen. He decided that she must have changed. "What makes you think she's got something?"

Vogel became indignant. He addressed an imaginary audience in anguished tones. "He can look at my face and ask me that!"

"Well," Shannon argued, "even you admitted the two guys weren't cops. Maybe they really didn't like your face."

"After what Lew Kronjager told me?" Vogel demanded. He pointed a pudgy quivering finger. "He wanted to know what I was working on, and when I wouldn't tell him he come right out and said they didn't like private eyes in Las Cruces. He said Whitey Loop, especially, didn't like 'em." A pink tongue explored the injury to his mouth. "It was right after that when these guys looked me up."

"You should have told him," Shannon said.

Vogel stared. "About Mrs. Thorelsen?"

"No," Shannon said kindly, "about an imaginary client." His smile became a trifle wolfish. "About, say, an old lady in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, whose husband was last heard of in the copper boom of 'Seventeen. She wondered if he was still living."

Vogel stared at him suspiciously. "What's this guy's name?"

"How the hell do I know?" Shannon

yelled. His eyes got a crafty look. "Let's see, now, it will have to be a common name, yet not so common that we'll actually find the guy."

Vogel was becoming slightly confused. "How can we find him if he don't exist?"

Shannon gnashed his teeth.

"Well, I just wondered," Vogel said. He picked at a raveling on his coat sleeve. "I knew a guy once named Johann Smith."

Shannon was startled. "What happened to him?"

"The 'Johann' was a giveaway," Vogel said. "He figured he couldn't part with both 'Johann' and 'Schmidt,' so he just changed the last half."

"What happened to him?"

"They shot him for a spy in London," Vogel said.

Shannon's sudden ribald laughter almost shook the ceiling down. And then, as it always did, swift reaction set in and he became gloomy. He wished that not only was there no Johann Smith, but that there was no Wynn Thorelsen either. Not that he didn't like Wynn. There had even been a time when he liked her very much indeed. But just the same, were it not for his obligation to her he could devote his time, all of it, to a certain Miss Carmen MacLeish and a rifle which might or might not be the one. He turned brooding dark eyes on Gus Vogel. "This Whitey Loop, what kind of a guy is he?"

Vogel shivered, though it was not cold in the room. "He's the kind that made the Purple Gang famous. He's got the cruellest pair of eyes I ever seen, except once, maybe."

Shannon was interested. "Where was that?"

"In the San Diego zoo," Vogel said. "On a tiger."

SHANNON picked up the phone and called the desk downstairs. "Who's the most prominent lawyer in town?"

The clerk was apologetic. "There's only one, Mr. Shannon." He qualified that. "In private practice, that is." He was impelled to extol the virtues of this solitary attorney. "He drinks a little, of course, but when it comes to the law you'll never find a better man than George St. Cyr."

He could just as well have kicked Shannon in the stomach. "What was that name again?"

"St. Cyr."

"Oh." For one brief moment Shannon considered calling the whole thing off. He would phone Wynn Thorelsen and tell her he was so sorry, please, but he was as bad as Gus Vogel; he couldn't work in Las Cruces either. This could not last, of course. Even as he thought of it, another part of Shannon's devious mind was already toying with the possibilities. There was a certain piquancy about doing business, or trying to do business, with the ex-husband of Carmen MacLeish. Certainly the man must know the town pretty well. And obviously he must know the lady with the green eyes and raven hair even better. "All right," Shannon told the clerk, "see if you can locate him for me and have him come up." As an afterthought he added, "You'd better send up a bottle of Mount Vernon and some ice too." He remembered Vogel, who was opposed to spirits. "And some beer."

The clerk coughed. "St. Cyr never drinks anything but Scotch, sir."

"All right, damn it, some Scotch too, then!" Shannon banged the phone down. "I'll bet he's a goddam Britisher." He was breathing angrily, gustily, through his nose. He glared at Vogel. "Well, what are you staring at?"

"My shoes," Vogel said. Vogel had very small feet of which he was inordinately proud. "They're pretty near new and I don't know anybody can use 'em when I'm gone."

"Then I'll bury you with them on," Shannon said brutally. "I'll see that they're put in the coffin myself." He had another thought and once more tackled the telephone. This time he inquired if there were a newspaper in town, and if so, would it be open at this time of night. It developed that there was and it would. He was presently talking to a man who said he was the editor of the Las Cruces *Clarion*. "I'd like to run a box on your front page. This is John J. Shannon and I'm stopping at the Navarro."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Shannon." There was the rustle of copy paper.

"Reward," Shannon dictated. "To settle an estate would like information

about one Johann Smith, believed to have been in Las Cruces-Corona district about 1917. Communicate with, etc., etc." He frowned portentously, as though he were personally vis a vis the *Clarion's* editor. "Got that?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then send me the bill," Shannon said. He cradled the phone just as there was a knock on the door. "Come in!"

A Mexican bell-hop in a purple suit came in bearing a loaded tray. Behind him was a tall, stoop-shouldered young man in baggy, very British tweeds. You knew he was young, though his hair was dead white. He had an engaging smile and the brown eyes of a disillusioned spaniel. He was very drunk. "Are you John J. Shannon?" Without waiting for a reply he sat down in the nearest chair. "I'm St. Cyr."

Shannon regarded him sourly. "I understood you just drank a little."

"I do," St. Cyr said amiably. "A little too much." He waved at the waiting bell-hop. "Just put it on the table, Manuelo, there's a good fellow." He fumbled in his pockets but could not find any money. "You tip him," he instructed Shannon.

"Well!" Shannon said. "Whose room is this, anyhow?"

"Yours," St. Cyr acknowledged. He sighed. "Who am I to deny it? I'm just your attorney."

Vogel got off the bed and went over and opened a bottle of beer. "Well, John J., it looks like you've went and hired yourself a lawyer." He took a tentative sip.

Shannon tipped the bell-hop and saw him to the door. When he turned he discovered that St. Cyr was already appreciating the bottle of Scotch. He was appreciating it straight from the neck and without benefit of ice. Shannon was outraged. "No, you don't. Not until we've had a conference."

St. Cyr relinquished the bottle without a struggle. In the light from the ceiling fixture his white hair became silver. "All right." He straightened his shoulders and became excessively military. "Carry on, me lads."

Shannon led him carefully back to the chair. "Look, I'm a private investigator, understand? I've got a license to work



St. Cyr

in California, Arizona and Nevada." He waved at Vogel. "Mr. Vogel, as one of my authorized operatives, is also licensed to work, right?"

For just an instant St. Cyr's brown eyes sharpened. "Quite." He relapsed into a dreamy contemplation of the White Horse bottle.

Shannon was not discouraged. He had worked with luses before. All you had to do was figure out the exact type of luse they were. He thought he had St. Cyr figured. "But the cops here are kind of tough, get it? First they warned off my operative, then they had him taken apart by a couple of hoods."

St. Cyr looked at him. "Very tough cops," he agreed.

Shannon went over and poured himself a shot of rye, and a small Scotch, a very small one, for his new attorney. "Well, now we're getting some place."

The Scotch scarcely touched St. Cyr's lips. "So you want me to keep you out of jail?" He extended his glass for a refill. "I'd have to know what you're working on."

"Of course," Shannon said. He was so certain now that he had St. Cyr figured that he allowed him another drink. He put a great deal of feeling into his description of Mrs. Johann Smith, of Sioux Falls, but more recently of Los Angeles.

"This poor old gal came all the way out to the Coast on the off chance of finding her husband before she kicked off." He passed a weary hand across his brow. "We've been working on it for almost a month now."

Vogel injected what he thought was a helpful remark. "And we finally traced him to Las Cruces."

Shannon's smile was a trifle forced. "We *think* we've traced him." He explained about inserting the ad in the *Clarion*. "Was that all right?"

St. Cyr opened his eyes very wide. "Quite."

"Then you'll help us?"

"Oh, yes," St. Cyr nodded. His head sagged abruptly and Shannon knew that he had misjudged the man's capacity. He had misjudged it by exactly one drink. He was furious. "Hey, you can't pass out on me now!"

St. Cyr lifted his tired head. "Saw you with my wife tonight. My ex-wife," he added carefully. "Beautiful girl, Carmen, what?"

Shannon's eyes had a harried look. He committed himself to the extent of a repressed, "Well, in a way."

"Beautiful," St. Cyr insisted. He got up and with his hands out in front of him, like a somnambulist, made his way to the bed where he promptly fell on his face. "Well, good night all."

IV

AT ONE-THIRTY in the morning there was no lessening of the bedlam which was Front Street. The change from the night shift to the graveyard shift had been accomplished with no notable exodus or influx. Some of the men coming down off the hill were dirtier, that was all. The saloons still flourished, and the cafes, and those combinations of both whose back rooms catered to men and women who liked to joust with Lady Luck. There was no secrecy about the gambling. It was there for one and all, and you either took it or left it alone, according to your lights or inclination.

A pale moon had finally penetrated the overhanging clouds, outlining the rim of the encroaching mountains and touching with silver the vast glacier of ore tailings

from the Las Cruces Consolidated's mill. The roar and rumble of the mill was a thunderous background, a kettle-drum overtone for the hectic, hysterical music of the town itself. Shannon had the distinct impression that the mountain was a volcano in imminent danger of eruption, and that the town felt this too and was drugging itself against an ultimate extinction from which there was no escape. High up the slope a thousand yellow eyes peered down from behind the ever-present pall of ore dust, the serrated windows of the mill and the shaft house and the administration buildings. The headlight of an ore train's locomotive was a flashing diamond, winking in and out among the peaks on its way from the Resurrection to the Tri-State Smelter at the far edge of the town. The Las Cruces Consolidated was between the two.

Shannon stood on the corner recently evacuated by a discouraged Salvation Army and watched with interested eyes the shifting pageant before him. He felt curiously without an entity of his own, as though he were a waith lost in the bowels of Hell. Half a dozen drinks and a deal of guarded inquiry had done nothing to dispel this illusion. He wished he had not let Gus Vogel go to bed.

The rain had had no permanent effect; already little dust clouds rose beneath scuffing feet, and the scurrying cars up and down the highway raised minor whirlwinds of it. A sprinkling truck came along presently and washed the pavement clean, but you had the feeling that it was futile. The ore dust was there. It would always be there. The deep bronze of men's faces became grayed with it.

Surprisingly, for this hour, there were a lot of women still abroad, women whom you instinctively knew were wives or sisters or daughters. The Las Cruces Consolidated's company store, a block-long blood brother to a Sears-Roebuck basement, sold groceries and silk stockings, plumbing fixtures and ladies' hats.

A hulking Swede stumbled through the swing doors of the Copper Pig, clutching his middle with widespread hands. Blood ran out of his belly and dyed his fingers. He fell to his knees, swaying back and forth at the edge of the curb, and a second man, small and squat and dark,

plunged out after him. This man had a knife and its blade too was red. Three other men came out after the second, but not as though they intended to do anything about him. They were just interested spectators. Shannon, breathing gustily through his nose, moved toward the gathering crowd. A siren cut a swath down the middle of the street, and two men got out of the police car. The smaller of the two yelled something at the squat man with the knife. His partner was momentarily lost sight of in the crowd. When he reappeared he was directly behind the squat man and he hit him a full-armed blow with a sap. He continued to hit him, again and again, apparently trying to drive him like a stake into the sidewalk.

The Swede who had been knifed finally quit swaying and fell forward on his face in the gutter. The man with the knife fell down too. An ambulance materialized beside the police car and, quite methodically, as though it were all just routine, the casualties were loaded in and hauled away. The smaller cop got back into the police car. The bulky one, the one who had wielded the sap, saw Shannon standing there at the edge of the crowd. "Well, blow me down!"

Shannon would have liked to do that very thing. "Hello, Lew." He did not offer to shake hands. He saw that Kronjager had put on weight, most of it around his middle. Kronjager had been kicked off the Los Angeles force, not, like Gus Vogel, for fumbling a case with a political angle, but for doing the same kind of thing to prisoners he had just done to the squat man. Kronjager would never learn apparently.

"Well, well," Kronjager said heartily, "it's a small world, hunh?" His voice was thick and there were ruptured veins in his nose and cheeks. He was quite drunk. Small inflamed eyes looked down at the sap in his hands and saw that it was sodden with blood. He tossed it into the back of the police car. "What brings you to Las Cruces?"

"I'm looking for a guy" Shannon said. He restrained an almost overwhelming impulse to hit Kronjager in the mouth. "Vogel seemed to be having a little trouble."

"Vogel probably got snotty."

Shannon looked at him. "I don't want to bother anybody, Lew. I just want to be let alone while I find this guy."

"What guy?"

"A man named Johann Smith," Shannon said carefully. He explained about Johann Smith. "I've got a thousand-dollar retainer and I'd like to earn it."

"Fair enough."

Kronjager's partner yelled at the crowd. "All right, break it up, break it up!" They broke it up. Some of them went back into the Copper Pig, where presently a woman began singing "My Man," throatily and pretty well. Shannon decided that neither the Swede nor the squat man with the knife had been her man. Apparently they had belonged to nobody. He resisted a desire to get roaring drunk.

Kronjager opened the right-hand car door and put a foot on the running board. "Think you'll be in town long?"

"I hope not," Shannon said. His eyes were half closed, sleepy looking. "Not if this is a sample." He spot. "I've got a weak stomach."

Kronjager appeared to think this was very funny. His belly shook when he laughed. "Well, drop around at Headquarters after a while. I've got something that's good for weak stomachs." He took his foot off the running board. "By the way, you got any ideas about who took a shot at that bus?"

"No."

Kronjager nodded. "That's swell." His small eyes were intent on Shannon's face. "You get any, you talk to Whitey or me."

"All right," Shannon said. He watched the police car vanish around the nearest corner.

THEN he turned and walked without apparent purpose out toward the east end of town, in the direction of Corona. When he came to the open highway, beyond the last of the street-lights, he increased his pace a little.

Occasionally a car went by, usually in a terrific hurry and leaving behind it a wake of profanity or obscene laughter. Shannon walked carefully on the left side of the highway until he came to the second crossroad beyond the smelter. Here

he paused and lit a cigarette, using the act to mask a swift survey of the road behind him. For the moment he was quite alone. He went quickly into the crossroad and to the car that was parked there without lights. "Hello, Wynn."

She leaned out of the car and he kissed her on the mouth, briefly. Her hands clung to him. "This is good of you, Shan."

"Nuts." He got in beside her and shut the door. He saw that she was in black, and that she was thinner. Beneath a modish little hat her hair was spun copper. Her gray eyes made him uncomfortable. "I'm sorry, Wynn, I came as soon as I could."

"You needn't have worried about me," she said. "That part of it was over and done with a long time ago."

He understood then that she knew why he hadn't come in the first place; why he had sent Vogel instead. He was suddenly ashamed under her calm scrutiny. "Well, hell—"

She nodded. "I guess it comes to all of us once, Shan. The real thing, I mean." Quite suddenly she turned and buried her face against the roughness of his coat. "I loved the guy, Shan."

He put an arm around her. "Sure you did, hon." His eyes looked blankly at the night. When he had known her she was a hostess in a night club, not as bad a profession as some perhaps, but not good either. She made her living out of the suckers who came in from just such towns as this one; guys who got fed up and wanted a fling at the big time. Bill Thorselsen had been such a guy.

She pushed herself free of him. Her profile was hard and clear-cut as a cameo. Her voice too had grown hard and taut. "They brought him home to me with a bullet in his head and they gave me ten thousand dollars to take his place." Her small gloved hands clenched tightly on the wheel. "They were kind. It's only the hunkies' widows who are supposed to get the insurance; the hunkies who get killed in the mines." She laughed. "Bill wasn't entitled to it, you see. Bill was a suicide."

Shannon's stomach crawled. "Cut it, Wynn."

After a while she said, tiredly. "All

right, Shan." Her chain came up. "Just the same, I'll spend every dime of it to hang the man who did it." She looked at him. "Something else has come up since I wrote you—since I talked to Vogel. I've had a robbery."

Shannon sat up a little straighter. "The hell you have!"

"Only they didn't take anything," she said. "They were just looking."

"For what?" Shannon didn't realize how sharply he had spoken till he saw her flinch. "I'm sorry, hon."

"It doesn't matter." Presently she said in the curiously hard flat voice, "I don't know what they were looking for. Probably for something they didn't find when they went through his papers up at the mill."

"They had the right to look at those," Shannon said.

"Of course. He was working for them, and there was the alleged shortage in his accounts."

It occurred to Shannon that he didn't know much about the Las Cruces Consolidated Mining Company, nor about Wolfgang Rygaard, the man who ran it. "What was Thorelsen's job?"

"Bill was engineer and chief assayer."

Shannon wondered what he himself would do if he had killed Bill Thorelsen and wanted to make it look like suicide. "What was the woman's name?"

Her lips made a thin uncompromising line. "There wasn't any woman. I tell you I knew Bill. I knew him inside and out."

"All right," Shannon said angrily, "the one they told you, then!"

She shivered. "Her name is Rose Machado. She runs a—a place over on the Avenida Juan Batista." Her hands clenched into fists. "I told her she lied. I told them all they lied."

"That wasn't very smart of you, hon," Shannon said gently. He thought it was odd that he could feel only gentleness for this woman beside him. He thought that perhaps he understood good haters. Shannon was a pretty good hater himself. He opened the car door. "I'll see what I can do, Wynn." He got out and stood there quietly for a moment. "If I were you, Wynn, I'd begin mixing around again. That way we can make our next meeting

look like an accident." He laughed harshly.

"If you like," she said. For an instant her eyes were as he had remembered them, deep gray pools in which you would not mind drowning. "We always did understand each other, Shan."

"Yes," he said. He waited till she had started the motor, waited till she had turned without lights into the main highway before he set match to a fresh cigarette and began retracing his way back to town and the Hotel Navarro. He saw by his wrist watch that it was just two o'clock.

Fitting his room key into the lock he became conscious of two things: first, the door was already unlocked; and second, his latest visitor was quite musical. A deep bass voice hummed something from Rachmaninoff, and, keeping time to it, there was a sort of hollow, measured slapping sound. Shannon opened the door.

GEORGE ST. CYR was still face down on the bed. The giant Pilsudski was on the bed too, only he was not asleep. He had nodded genially and energetically at Shannon, but it was obvious that he was not going to stop humming until he had finished the passage. He had Shannon's bottle of Mount Vernon by the neck and with it he slapped majestic cadence into the cupped palm of his large left hand. The bottle was quite empty.

Shannon closed the door and leaned his back against it. He was beyond surprise. "Are you sure you're perfectly comfortable, pal?"

Pilsudski finished his allotted task. "Sure," he said, "Pilsudski always comfortable." His golden-toothed smile belied the intentness of his eyes. The eyes were as blue and ingenious as ever, but Shannon had the feeling that this guy could be a very tough number indeed. Pilsudski raised himself on one elbow. "So you are detective, yes?"

Shannon could scarcely deny it. His last information on Pilsudski fixed him as the mayor of Las Cruces, and as such he must be aware of what the police department knew for a fact. He nodded. "Well, in a way, yes."

"Good," Pilsudski said. He stood up

slowly. "You know who try wrecking those bus?"

Shannon licked his lips. "No."

"You are on it," Pilsudski pointed out. "Maybe is not me they try to kill. Maybe is you."

Shannon had already considered this possibility. Nevertheless he became violently angry. "I don't give a damn if I was!" He took off his hat and topcoat and hurled them at a chair. "Maybe the bus driver's wife doesn't like him any more. Maybe—" His dark eyes brooded on the sleeping figure of St. Cyr. "Hell's fire, how should I know who it was?"

Pilsudski's voice was insistent. "But you are detective?"

Shannon scowled. "I told you, didn't I?"

"Then you are finding out," Pilsudski directed him calmly. "You finding out and you telling nobody but Pilsudski." Thick fingers curled suddenly about the empty bottle. It collapsed like eggshell. "You better." He regarded the shattered fragments of glass in his hand with an air of pleased surprise. "Yep, Pilsudski think you better." He went out.

Shannon went over to the tray on the table, looking for a drink. The bottle of Scotch was empty too. All that was left was some of Gus Vogel's beer.

There was a knock on the door. Shannon went toward it cautiously, holding the beer bottle like a club. "Yes?"

A furtive voice insinuated itself through the panel. "Talk to you a minute, pal?"

Shannon opened the door. His visitor, like the voice, was furtive and insinuating. He slid obliquely into the room. "I'm friends, pal. You can put the bottle down." He was a smallish man in a checked suit, blue Chesterfield and dark blue Homburg. Tan-colored eyes were set too far apart in a flat expressionless face. "You're Shannon, hunh?" His lips scarcely moved.

Shannon acknowledged his identity. "And you?"

"Max Mueller," the small man said. Still with that furtive air but with unbelievable rapidity he went over to the bed, lifted St. Cyr's head, lifted one of St. Cyr's eyelids, let both eyelid and head drop. "He'll do," he whispered. "Out sold." He turned to find Shannon tow-

ering over him. "Now wait a minute, pal. Don't get sore."

Shannon let his hands drop. "You'll have to talk fast then. I'm getting sick of living in a ball park."

"Of course you are, chum, of course you are." Mueller dropped his voice to an even more intimate level. "What are you working on, pal?" He winked. He got out a card that said he was business agent for the Mine Workers' local. "What did you and Pilsudski talk about?"

Shannon folded the card, very carefully, as though it were the most important thing in the world. "Mr. Max Mueller," he said distinctly, "if I did happen to be working on something, and if I did happen to talk to Pilsudski, you are the last guy in Las Cruces I'd discuss it with." He reached out and got a fistful of Mueller's necktie and shirt. "Am I making myself quite clear—chum?"

Mueller made strangling noises. "Don't!"

"All right," Shannon said. He released the man and opened the door, pointing. "Good night, Mr. Mueller." As Mr. Mueller scuttled past him he planted a terrific kick where he thought it would do the most good. "And don't come back, ever." He closed the door.

The telephone rang. It turned out to be Los Angeles calling and presently this led to Miss Frances McGowan. "Good morning, darling."

"As though I haven't got enough troubles!"

Miss McGowan was profoundly shocked. "Is that a nice way to act?"

"I don't care!" Shannon shouted. "I'm not going to have you sticking your nose in my business."

"As if I would," Frances said. There was a brief hiatus. Then, very sweetly: "So you've been having troubles?"

"No!"

"But you just said you were, darling." Shannon's eyes were harried. "You woke me up out of a sound sleep. I'd been dreaming?"

"Of me, Shan?"

He scowled. "No."

"And you wouldn't like for me to come up and help you?"

"No."

She pretended to accept this dictum

philosophically. "Well, good night."

"Good night," he said grudgingly. He was on the point of disconnecting when behind him there was the crash of glass. He turned just in time to see something come hurtling through the window; something that looked like nothing so much as a thick yellow candle with a curiously sputtering wick. It was pure reflex action which made him plunge toward it rather than away from it, and seize it and hurl it back at the shattered window. But even then he was not quite quick enough. The floor seemed to lift under his feet, and there was a sound like no other sound on earth, and the world dissolved in a mass of searing flame and noise and compression which gripped him and wrung from him every drop of consciousness.

THERE was no pain. Shannon's mind toyed with this phenomenon, nebulously at first, then, as memory brought a fuller awareness, with a kind of fierce disbelief. He did not open his eyes. He was afraid to open them. He wished as long as possible to retain the image of his own body with all its arms and legs intact. He had heard, somewhere, that you felt an amputated member still a part of you. It was certainly like that with Shannon. Each nerve end was a quivering, jumping hair, shot with electricity; his whole being was alive with it, sensitized to the slightest sound. It was the sound that did it. The sound was a man's laugh. It was not a nice laugh. Shannon opened his eyes.

The man standing at the foot of the narrow hospital bed was tall and very, very beautiful. He was about the most beautiful man Shannon had ever seen. He could have been described as pretty, until you saw his eyes. They had golden irises, like a cat's, and like a cat's they were the cruelest eyes in the world. His hair was curly and the color of Fran McGowan's, champagne. The left breast of his dinner jacket bulged slightly more than the show handkerchief could account for.

It was this man who had laughed. "You were lucky," he said. After a moment he added, almost absently, "This time."

Shannon's lips moved, but no sound came out. He became conscious that there were other people in the room. There was a tired-looking man in sterile white, with a stethoscope dangling from his neck, and there was a very fat nurse.

Presently he saw a woman who was not the nurse. Shannon's voice came back to him with a rush. "Hello, MacLeish."

"Hello, Shannon." Her voice was even richer than he had remembered it. "Been playing with matches again?"

Shannon licked his lips. "Unh-hunh." The sound of rain beating against the windows drew his eyes to them and he saw Gus Vogel standing there. Vogel's round pink face was rimed with ore dust, or possibly plaster dust, except for two very clean streaks below his blue eyes. He blew his nose loudly. "I don't care," he stated. "You scare hell out of me sometimes, John J."

Shannon was embarrassed for him. "A fine thing!" He looked around but could not find the other victim of the explosion. "St. Cyr?"

Carmen MacLeish made an impatient gesture. "St. Cyr is all right. You probably saved his life but he was too drunk to appreciate it." Long lashes screened her eyes for a moment and she said, as though to herself, "I'm going to have to ask Giles to do something about St. Cyr. I'm tired having him around under my feet."

"You don't have to ask your father," the tall man at the foot of the bed said. The implication was that he would be glad to relieve Giles, or her, of the responsibility of taking care of George St. Cyr.

Her full red mouth was almost sullen. "The MacLeishes manage their own business."

"But not very well," the handsome man said. His cat eyes rested intently on Shannon's face. "In case you don't know it, I'm Floyd Loop, Chief of Police around here."

"I guessed," Shannon said. "Vogel described you."

Loop smiled. He had lovely teeth too. "Vogel is a fool. He ought to have told me what he was working on."

Over by the windows Gus Vogel seemed in imminent danger of apoplexy, but took it out in coughing.

"Well, you know how these Dutchmen are," Shannon said. "Stubborn."

"Sure." Loop brushed an imaginary speck of dust from a coat lapel. "I hope you're not going to be the same way." He looked directly at Shannon. "Stubborn, I mean."

"About what?" Shannon demanded. "Didn't I tell Kronjager? Didn't I tell my attorney?" He was outraged. "Why, I even put it in the newspaper!"

"There's a classic line about a guy who protested too much," Loop said. He shrugged his nicely tailored shoulders. "Let's skip that for a while and talk about dynamite. Who threw it at you?"

"I don't know."

"And I don't like that kind of answer," Loop said.

SHANNON'S nerve ends were still jumpy. He raised himself on one elbow. "Well, then, the hell with you. Why not ask Miss MacLeish?" The lady with the green eyes was outside his new range of vision, but he heard an abrupt intake of breath. "It was she who mentioned that I'd probably saved St. Cyr's life. Possibly she was around to see it."

Loop shook his head. He seemed able to shake his head from side to side while his golden cat eyes remained perfectly stationary. "Miss MacLeish was dancing with me at the country club."

"Then that lets both of you out," Shannon said. He had a reasonably intelligent thought. "Maybe it was George St. Cyr your party was after." His smile was unpleasant. "Though that brings us back to the lady and yourself, doesn't it?"

The lady in question said a very naughty word indeed. "Are you looking for trouble, Mr. Shannon?"

He stared at her with an air of vast surprise. "Who, me?"

"Pilsudski was up in your room too," Whitey Loop said.

Shannon made a bitter mouth. "That's what I mean. You'd think it was a three-ring circus."

Loop grinned faintly.

"What did Pilsudski want?"

"He thought I might know who took a shot at the bus." Shannon could not have sworn to it, but he thought that for just

a moment Carmen MacLeish looked very sick indeed.

"But you couldn't help him out?" Loop persisted.

By this time Shannon's nerves were screaming. He had never been in an explosion before and the symptoms were new to him. He wondered if he were going to die. "No, I couldn't help him out! I can't help anybody out. All I do is go around shoveling dynamite out the window when somebody throws it in!"

The doctor felt called upon to intervene. "You'd better let him rest for a while, Chief. He's liable to end up with the screaming meemies." He became stiffly professional. "Shock, you know." He signaled the nurse, who picked up a hypodermic from a tray on the dresser and came toward Shannon with it. She let him have it. "There!"

Shannon slept. He awoke to find a bright morning sun outside his windows. Miss Frances McGowan was in the room. "Well, it's about time," she said.

Unaccountably, Shannon was pleased. He should have been very angry indeed, but though he pretended to be, he was not. "So you couldn't keep your nose clean."

"With you strewn in little pieces all over Arizona?" Miss McGowan was indignant. "If you don't want people to worry why don't you hang up your phone while you're getting bombed?"

HE examined her, to see if she'd been crying, like Vogel. There was no evidence of it. Her face was smooth and unmarred by even the tiniest flaw. She was quite striking in a forest green wool ensemble and caracul greatcoat. Green plastic pumps drew your attention to a pair of nylon-sheathed legs which were faultless. "A lot you care," Shannon grumbled. He scowled. "You're nothing but a snoop, that's what you are. A sort of perambulating conscience."

Frances seized on this. "Oh, so you've been doing things you shouldn't?"

He leered. "Just a kiss or two." He smacked his lips. "Nice."

"Is that why you were bombed?"

He became sullen. "How do I know?" He looked intently at the closed door. Miss McGowan, interpreting the look cor-

rectly, went over and opened the door. There was no eavesdroppers. She closed the door. Shannon was amazed. "You mean they let you in to see me without Kronjager or somebody hanging around?"

"I talked to a man named Whitey Loop," Fran admitted. She tucked a stray wisp of champagne-colored hair beneath the green turban. Her brown eyes had a speculative gleam. "Isn't he handsome?"

"Beautiful," Shannon said. His stomach tied itself in a knot at thought of what Miss McGowan might have said to Chief of Police Floyd Loop. "What did you tell him?"

Miss McGowan preened herself before the mirror. "I saw Gus Vogel first, darling."

Shannon was relieved. "Well, that's something." He told her about Wynn Thorelsen. "You probably wouldn't understand how she feels." He viewed her with a jaundiced eye. "You haven't any soul."

"I have too a soul," Fran insisted. She peered into the mirror, as though looking for it. "It's a very beautiful soul." She nodded her head in appreciation of what she saw. "Like me."

Shannon wiggled his toes beneath the covers. They still worked. He discovered that he felt swell. "Well, what am I doing in bed?" He sat up.

Frances regarded him. "I don't know." "You don't know what?"

"What you've been doing in bed." She feigned an intense interest in the chart at the foot of the bed. "Who was that black-haired Sheba with the green eyes?"

Shannon flushed. "My attorney's wife."

"Your attorney's ex-wife."

"All right," Shannon yelled, "his ex-wife!"

The door opened and the fat nurse in rustling white stuck her head in. "Did you call?"

Shannon glared at her. "I want my clothes."

She sniffed. "The clothes you don't ain't fit to be seen in." She made gestures which she hoped were descriptive of an explosion followed by fire. "Pffft!" She stared with patent disfavor at the splendor which was Frances McGowan. "He could have some orange juice."

"Orange juice," Shannon sneered. His voice rose. "I don't want any orange juice, damn it, I want my clothes!"

THE new room at the Navarro differed little from the old one, except that it was on the sixth floor instead of the second, a circumstance arranged by Shannon himself. It had been ascertained that the unknown dynamiter had hurled his makeshift bomb from the roof of the one-story garage adjoining the hotel, and the roof of the garage had suffered, and also a considerable portion of brick wall surrounding Shannon's window. Shannon had no wish to experience a repeat performance.

Gus Vogel came in. His round pink face was worried. "Well, I done like you said," he announced with an affection of brisk efficiency. "Consolidated's time-keepers are combing their old records for a guy named Johann Smith." Blue eyes clouded a little. "Though you know as well as I do, John J., they ain't gonna find him."

Shannon looked at him. "Do we have to go all over that again?"

"Well—"

Shannon got off the bed and poured himself a drink. He did not offer Vogel any. "You see this Wolfgang Rygaard?"

Vogel admitted sadly that he had indeed seen the general manager of Las Cruces Consolidated. "I had to get his permission before they'd let me talk to anybody else." He shivered. "That place is like a fort, John J. I even seen a stenographer carrying a gun!"

Shannon received this information without apparent surprise.

Vogel's eyes searched the corners of the room for possible eavesdroppers. "This Rygaard is quite a party," he observed.

Shannon nodded. "I knew you'd get to the point sooner or later."

"They're all scared of him," Vogel said. Shannon was startled. "Who is?"

"Everybody," Vogel said. He spread pudgy pink hands in an all-inclusive gesture. "He's a driver."

Shannon's fingers curled, as though he might like to bury them in Vogel's throat. He resisted the impulse. "Horses or cars?"

Vogel was hurt. "There you go, John J., always ribbing me." His forehead wrinkled. "I'm trying to give you the picture just like I seen it."

"Fine," Shannon said with elaborate sarcasm. "When you get all through I'll get you a job doing murals in Washington." He snapped his fingers. "Look, Mrs. Thorelsen has practically accused Rygaard of complicity in her husband's murder. Does he look like that kind of a guy?"

Vogel was indignant. "You ought to know better than that, John J. Murderers don't never look like murderers." He took off his hat and peered into it. "Just the same, this guy strikes me as about the cold-bloodedest fish I ever seen. He's got eyes like—now—gimlets."

Shannon glared at him. "He find out anything from you?"

"Certainly not," Vogel said with great dignity. "All I told him—all I told anybody—is that we're looking for a guy named Johann Smith."

"All right, so he'd cut his grandmother's heart out and laughed while he was doing it. What else?"

Vogel's expression was puzzled. "There's something going on in this town—something bigger than just the murder of one guy. I dunno what it is. I just feel it." He patted his breast. "In here." He brightened. "Maybe you'll feel it too, John J." He looked at the ceiling. "If he hires you."

Shannon remained absolutely motionless for all of sixty seconds. "If who hires me for what?"

"Why, Wolfgang Rygaard. Ain't I been telling you?"

It was at this moment that the building began to tremble, gently enough at first, but with increasing violence, till the windows rattled and the floor vibrated under Shannon's feet. A sound as of distant thunder accompanied this phenomenon. Shannon discovered that his reflection in the dresser mirror had grown quite pale. "So they're going to try *that* again!"

Vogel was apparently unaffected. "Sure, four times a day they do it. Them was the noon shots in the mines."

Utter silence descended on the room. The noise and the vibration were gone as suddenly as they had come. Shannon

exhaled. He sank weakly into the nearest chair. After a time it occurred to him that something Vogel had said was almost as startling as the blasts from the underground workings. "Why does Wolfgang Rygaard think he needs a private dick?"

Vogel looked at his feet. "If you ask me, I don't think he believes in this—now—mythical Johann Smith any more than I do." He sighed. "Not after what happened to you last night."

Shannon's nostrils flared a little. "Oh, so he mentioned that too, did he?"

"Unh-hunh."

Shannon stood up violently. "And what else?"

Vogel thought. "Well, like this I said, he wants to see you. He says to tell you that if you got some spare time on your hands he can maybe use you, and that money's no object."

A glow that could have been avarice came into Shannon's eyes. "How cute."

HE bent over one of his suitcases and rummaged through it till he came upon his gun, a Police Positive that he had carried so long the blue was worn off in spots. He thrust the gun into the waistband of his pants, beneath his vest. "Do me a favor, Dutch?"

Vogel was apprehensive. "Well, sure, but—"

Shannon looked at him. "Get Fran McGowan out of town."

Vogel became more than apprehensive. He was appalled. "Now look, John J., how would I go about doing that?"

Shannon flushed. "How do I know? If I knew I'd do it myself, wouldn't I?" He resorted to cajolery. "She likes you, Gus. Just yesterday she was telling me how much she liked you."

Vogel's round pink face became a shade pinker. "No!"

"Fact," Shannon assured him. He got a light tweed topcoat out of the closet, shrugged into it, found his slightly battered Borsalino and put that on too. "This town is no place for a girl like Miss McGowan, you know that Dutch."

"Well—"

Shannon pretended that the matter was all settled. "That's fine, Dutch, you'll never regret it." He was almost to the

door when Vogel had an afterthought. "Now wait a minute, John J." He fixed his eyes on the slight bulge beneath Shannon's vest. "Why wouldn't it be a good idea if we all just kind of went home and forgot about things?"

Shannon's mouth was unpleasant. "Such as?"

"Well, about last night and one thing and another." He did not look at Shannon directly. "What I mean is, I know you, John J., and I know how you feel, but it ain't gonna do no good to get yourself shot full of holes, is it?"

Shannon's teeth shone whitely against the darkness of his skin. "Just how do I feel, Gus?"

Vogel had one of his rare flashes of insight. "Like blasting somebody's guts out." His small hands made a resigned gesture. "Not that I blame you, you understand, but—"

Shannon nodded. "Then that's swell, Dutch. Just forget it and try to do what I asked you." He went out, banging the door loudly behind him. Miss McGowan and George St. Cyr were just debouching from the elevator. St. Cyr was being very attentive, or so it seemed to Shannon, until, looking closer, he discovered that St. Cyr was clinging to her because he was too drunk to stand alone. "A fine kind of lawyer," Shannon sneered.

St. Cyr used his free hand to politely stifle a hiccough. "My sincerest thanks, old fellow." He waved vaguely. "Not for the compliment. For saving my life, you know."

"I didn't even remember you were in the room," Shannon said ungraciously, and quite truthfully. He scowled at Miss McGowan. "You'd better get Vogel out of town. I hear those same two gorillas are laying for him."

Miss McGowan appeared unimpressed. "Why don't you get him out of town yourself?"

"He won't go," Shannon said. "He's worried about you."

"Oh?"

"Well, he is," Shannon insisted. "He's scared stiff but he thinks more of you than he does of his own skin." This seemed to puzzle him no end. "Though what he sees in you is more than I can understand."

Miss McGowan prodded St. Cyr to a semblance of life. "Now isn't that too gallant of Mr. Shannon, George?"

Shannon suffered a momentary twinge of jealousy. "So you're calling each other by your first names already!"

"Of course," Frances said. "George is going to help me on the background for a story, aren't you, Georgie?" She looked at Shannon. "George is just full of local color."

"George is full of Scotch."

"Well, Scotch *and* local color," Fran conceded.

St. Cyr giggled. "That's very good, m'dear." He passed a tired hand over his eyes. This seemed to clear his vision so that he really saw Shannon for the first time. "Oh, there you are, my good fellow." He resembled a very earnest crane as he bent to peer into Shannon's face. "As your attorney I advise you to be circumspect when the police question you. I was not circumspect." He considered that gravely. "Indeed, if my esteemed ex-father-in-law had not rescued me I probably should not be here and able to advise you at all."

Shannon's eyes got a cagy look. "Mac-Leish? I was just on my way up to see him."

St. Cyr blinked owlishly. "Then be circumspect with him too." He smiled fondly down on Fran McGowan. "Be circumspect with everyone, eh, m'dear?" He attempted to lift his hat to Shannon, but was unsuccessful because he had obviously mislaid it somewhere. "Well, it's been nice seeing you again."

"Hasn't it!" Shannon snarled. He glared at Frances. "You'd better get Vogel out of town. If you don't I won't be responsible!" He strode angrily down the hall, jabbed the elevator button incessantly until an outraged hell-hop brought the car up. "Why don't you do your sleeping at night?"

"In this dump?" the kid demanded. He looked pointedly at Shannon's chin. "With the kind of guests we have?"

VII

THE cab had the wheezes. In the tonneau, feet propped on a dilapidated jump seat. Shannon considered the crawling

panorama which was Front Street. He decided that he hated Las Cruces more than any other town in the world except, possibly, Tia Juana, Mexico, where he had once spent three days in jail because he'd lost his wallet and couldn't prove he was a cop.

Daylight had brought a semblance of normalcy to Las Cruces. The sidewalks were only moderately crowded, and the shopping trend was definitely mercantile rather than escape entertainment. Shannon was surprised to see kids on the lawn of the Las Cruces Union High School. He had got the impression that the town was childless as well as godless.

On the seat beside him he discovered a copy of the *Clarion*, and he opened this out and saw his own boxed advertisement for one Johann Smith. He read that The Outlet, your *independent* store, had just received a new shipment of wood-pegged work shoes, guaranteed against copper rot. He read that copper was now at its highest level since 1917. He was intrigued by the information that Las Cruces sat more or less calmly atop a vast honeycomb of subterranean workings, and that when you bought a building lot anywhere in the county your ownership was limited to a depth of only fifty feet. Beneath that the ground belonged to, or was claimed by, either the Consolidated Mining Company or the Resurrection Copper Company.

There was a humorous story about a Pole named Mankiewicz whose chicken coops had vanished overnight. It seemed that a couple of drillers, drunk and a trifle overzealous, had loaded with sixty per cent instead of forty per cent, and the succeeding blast had pulled the mountain down clear from the grass roots. The weight of Mr. Mankiewicz's chicken coops had done the rest. There was a not-so-humorous story about a cave-in at the 1800-foot level. Twelve men had died because of that. Shannon recalled something that Wynn Thorelsen had said. If the companies paid off at the rate of ten thousand dollars per man, twelve men would equal a hundred and twenty grand. Shannon thought that that was a lot of money. He was amazed at the total absence of political comment. It was as though the *Clarion* avoided it on purpose. Beyond a terse announcement of the next weekly Council meeting there

was nothing whatever to show that Las Cruces wasn't a political orphan.

The driver was a Swede. Shannon addressed the back of the driver's neck. "You have many accidents like this one in the paper?"

"Yah."

"Well, why don't they do something about it?" Shannon demanded.

Briefly the driver's eyes met Shannon's in the rear-vision mirror. "You going do something?"

"No," Shannon said. He shook his head. "Not me."

The driver apparently considered the conversation finished. He concentrated on tooling his chariot laboriously up the long slope toward the cluster of buildings under the big sign of the Resurrection Copper Company. Topping the rise at last, the cab halted before a sprawling one-story concrete building whose bronze and plate-glass doors were labeled: "General Offices." Surprisingly, the doors and half a hundred steel-casemented windows were clean. Indeed the whole top of the hill was clean, and bordering the winding macadam drive there were lawns and flower beds. A sprinkling system tossed spray into the sun with a kind of misty rainbow effect. In spite of the sun the air was thin and sharp, and there was snow on some of the higher peaks. Shannon's breathing quickened perceptibly as he saw Carmen MacLeish's red Cadillac parked in the zone reserved for executives. He paid off the hacker and went inside.

The room was a big one, and there were perhaps a dozen clerks behind the long mahogany counter. Adding machines and typewriters made a pleasantly commonplace sound. There was even a girl in a frilly white silk blouse behind a desk marked: "Information." Beneath the sheer silk Shannon could see that she wore a pale green slip. Her eyes met his frankly admiring gaze and she flushed a little. "Did you wish something?"

Shannon said that he did indeed wish something. "Mr. MacLeish, preferably." He took off his hat. "The name is Shannon."

He could just as well have said he was Mephisto. There was instant silence in the big white room.

SHANNON looked at the girl. "What's the matter, don't you like the name?"

"Certainly," she said. She became even more flustered. "I—I like it very much." She lifted a phone, flipped an annunciator switch and announced that a Mr. Shannon was asking for Mr. MacLeish. She was patently relieved when a door opened at the far end of the room and a man came out. He was a tremendously wide man, and thick, and a double-breasted blue business suit made him look even wider and thicker. He rolled down the aisle on short thick legs, hand outstretched, his voice a cheerful booming sound. "Well, well, so you're Shannon!" Black hair grew down to the second joints of his fingers.

Mindful of Pilsudski, Shannon shook the hand gingerly. He was relieved when he got all his fingers back intact. "Thanks."

MacLeish's laughter shook the room. "I like that, I do indeed. Nothing like a sense of humor in a man." He put an arm around Shannon's shoulders. "Come on, boy, come right in. Welcome to the Resurrection!"

Amid a veritable frenzy of activity from the clerical staff he convoyed Shannon up the aisle and through the door from which he had emerged. He closed the door and leaned his broad back against it. His joviality fell from him like a discarded cloak. "Who threw that dynamite at you?"

"I don't know," Shannon said. He was getting a little tired of everybody in Las Cruces asking him the same question. He was also at a loss to account for his somewhat peculiar reception. He jerked his head in the direction of the outer office. "What's the matter with them out there? You'd think I was a ghost."

"Well, you damned near were," Giles MacLeish said. He went over to his desk. It was a huge desk, just as MacLeish himself gave you the impression of being huge, though in reality he was not so tall as Shannon. He was wider, certainly, and a good fifty pounds heavier, but in a fight Shannon would still have bet on Pilsudski. He wondered why the idea of a fight between the two men should have occurred to him. Perhaps it was Carmen MacLeish's manner toward the big golden-haired Pole who was mayor of Las Cruces. MacLeish gnawed the end from a thick

black cigar. "Two escapes in one night make you something of a celebrity."

Shannon looked at the ornate paneling of the office, at the deep-piled carpet, at the cut stone fireplace. A kind of pearly gray light filtered through the Venetian blinds at the windows. The blinds were tightly shut. "I have no idea that the attempts were aimed at me," he said carefully. "In both instances, you may remember, there were others present."

MacLeish's eyes were as black and hard as jet. "So you're sticking to the story of looking for a man named Johann Smith?" Shannon's mouth drooped. "You wouldn't be calling me a liar, would you?"

MacLeish blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "You don't have to be afraid of me, Shannon. What are you working on?"

"A guy named Johann Smith."

MacLeish pretended to be very interested in the ash on his cigar. "That's what you told Whitey Loop."

"That's what I'm telling everybody," Shannon said. He moved his shoulders impatiently. "If you don't choose to believe it, that's your business."

The swivel chair creaked a little under MacLeish's weight. He put both hands flat on the desk. "You wouldn't have been sent out here by my Head Office, would you?"

"No."

MacLeish considered that. "Damned if I don't believe you," he said presently. He got up and began pacing the floor. "How are you with a gun, Shannon?"

Shannon was moved to do a little probing on his own account. Indeed that was his real reason for coming up here in the first place. "With a rifle?" he suggested.

MacLeish made an angry gesture. "Carmen told me about that." He pointed his cigar at Shannon's nose. "The rifle in her car was mine. I've got half a dozen others. This is deer season."

Shannon's estimate of Carmen MacLeish's intelligence rose considerably. He thought that it was marvelous to find intelligence and beauty in the same woman. "We'll have to go hunting together sometime," he said.

MacLeish looked at him. "That's an excellent idea," he agreed. "My own, in fact. It brings up the subject of Johann Smith and how much time you can spare

from your—search." He laughed without mirth. "At a price, of course."

Shannon thought this was very funny. "You're the second guy that's offered me employment this morning." He leered. "Not to mention one I had last night, though there was no money involved in that case. It was just intimated that if I didn't produce the guy with a rifle I'd probably get my neck broken."

MacLeish nodded. "That would be Pil-sudski."

"Unh-hunh."

"And who was the other one?"

Shannon's eyes glowed. "Sorry, that comes under the head of private business."

"Then I'll tell you," MacLeish said.

HE WENT over to the east window and opened the blinds and stood there looking out at the distant peaks. "But first I'm going to tell you a story." He pointed. "I was born down there in Horseface Canyon, in a shack made out of flattened kerosene cans. I came to work in the Resurrection when it was nothing but a hole in the ground." He turned and looked at Shannon from beneath lowering brows. "I'm just telling you this so you'll understand that this is my town they're ruining."

Something in the older man's attitude, in the tone of his voice, struck an answering chord in Shannon. Perhaps it was a reflection of himself, that innermost self which even he rarely looked at. "Who?"

"Rygaard," MacLeish said.

Shannon stared at him. "Why?"

MacLeish resumed his pacing. "It goes back a long way," he said presently. "I told you how I started. I ended up as general manager of the Resurrection." He hurled his dead cigar into the fireplace. "Before Las Cruces Consolidated came into the territory I owned the town too—at least I ran it. Then Consolidated did come in, and with it the smelter, and competition began. There were arguments over boundaries that were difficult of adjustment, because this whole damned county was always loosely surveyed." His broad mouth twisted in a wry smile. "Fact of the matter is, most of it was in the public domain and good for nothing but mining and goats."



MacLeish

Shannon discovered a well-stocked liquor cabinet. Without being asked he went over and helped himself to a drink. He wondered what all this had to do—if any—with the alleged murder of Bill Thorelsen. Not that he was really thinking of it as just alleged any more. The seemingly pointless robbery at Wynn Thorelsen's house was almost definite evidence to the contrary. Also there was the matter of a certain hunk of dynamite thrown at a man named John J. Shannon. He decided that whatever Giles MacLeish chose to tell him, and regardless of the motivation behind the telling, he, Shannon, could not lose by listening.

"Underground," MacLeish was saying, "opposing crews were continually running into each other. Indiscriminate blasting was wrecking my drifts and stopes, yes, even my main levels." He puffed furiously at a fresh cigar. "All right, I may as well admit it—I did some of the wrecking, too. There wasn't any good appealing to law. There wasn't any law except force, and the main idea was to get out the copper." He paused and stood there on his short thick legs, head thrust slightly forward, like a truculent bull. "Ever hate a man—hate him so bad you could taste it?"

"Unh-hunh."

"Well, that's the way I hated, and still

hate, Wolfgang Rygaard. To him and his outfit, this was strictly a money proposition. To me it was—well, my life." He seemed curiously embarrassed under Shannon's eyes. "An illustration of what I mean is that when the end of the boom came, when the bottom fell out of copper, Consolidated shut down." He laughed harshly. "Me, I talked my board of directors into letting me go on running. With Consolidated out of the way I even made a little money."

"That brings us up to date," Shannon said, "Or almost." He poured himself another drink, a very small one this time. "A new boom came along and Consolidated opened up again."

MacLeish nodded. "And they sent Rygaard back." Big hands knotted into fists. "The clashes haven't been so open this time. We've had a lot of costly and unexplained accidents, and because of the accidents we had a general strike. Because of the strike, and the feeling of the men, I had to import a bodyguard. When the old chief of police got himself shot I put my bodyguard in."

Shannon carefully lidded his eyes so that his sudden eagerness wouldn't show. "Whitey Loop?"

"Yes." MacLeish went around the desk and sat heavily in his big chair. "That wasn't so smart. I hear every gambling game in town has gone crooked, and Loop is getting a cut." He sighed. "At that, he was efficient in maintaining order, and while I was mayor I could halfway control him." He scowled at Shannon. "On the surface I still do, but—"

"Where does Pilsudski fit?"

MacLeish flushed angrily. "Pilsudski is Rygaard's man. Rygaard ran him against me in the last election—you know, the man of the people." His voice became savage. "I'm still on the Council, and if I've got Whitey Loop I've still got the two other members necessary for control. The trouble is—" He stood up violently. "Damn it, I'm laying my cards on the table for you, Shannon. I think Loop has sold out to Rygaard!"

"Why?"

"Because Rygaard doesn't give a damn what happens to the men, or the town!"

"Or you?" Shannon suggested.

"Or me most of all," MacLeish admit-

ted sourly. "This hate I've been telling you about isn't all one-sided. Rygaard would like nothing better than to have my operations look so sick that the owners would either close down or sell out." His voice rose. "You think I like having the men call the Resurrection a death trap? You think I can go on losing money in the middle of a boom and still keep my job?"

Shannon stared out over the valley. "What do you think I can do about it?"

MacLeish pounded the desk in an access of rage. "You're a detective, aren't you? Find out if Whitey Loop has thrown in with Rygaard!"

Shannon looked at him. "In order to do that I may have to pretend to throw in with Rygaard myself."

MacLeish was startled. Indeed something very like fear came into his eyes, and for a moment he looked positively sick. "How will I know that—"

"It's only a pretense?" Shannon laughed suddenly. "You won't, pal. That's just a chance you'll have to take."

VIII

POLICE HEADQUARTERS was in a two-story yellow brick building. Shannon went up three stone steps and into a dim square lobby which smelled mustily of wet linoleum and brass polish. A steel grille barred stairs leading downward, apparently to the jail, and there were more stairs leading upward. Between the two stairs was an alcove with a counter across it, and behind the counter was a cop with sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve. On the counter itself was a round brass cuspidor, and on Shannon's entrance the sergeant leaned toward the receptacle and ridded himself of a cud the size of a billiard ball. "Hi," he said.

"Hello," Shannon said. "Is Whitey Loop in?"

The sergeant appeared to be looking for Whitey Loop under the counter, but when he once more straightened all he had was a hunting knife and a half-pound slab of Star. He pointed with the knife. "In there."

Shannon saw that there was a ground glass door bearing the simple legend: "Chief." He crossed to the door and opened it. Lew Kronjager was playing

solitaire on the scarred oak desk under the front windows. In daylight his face looked even puffier than usual, and the tiny ruptured veins in his nose and cheeks were a faint magenta. "Hellow, Lew," Shannon said. He smiled pleasantly. "I heard you boys wanted to talk to me some more."

Kronjager laid a king on top of a queen, carefully, as though it were the most important thing in the world. "So you rushed right over," he said. He looked pointedly at the big clock on the wall. It was four o'clock.

Shannon took off his hat and shaped it between strong brown fingers. "Well, no," he admitted. "I had some things to do, and besides I figured if it was important you'd have looked me up."

"I see your girl friend checked out of the Navarro," Kronjager said.

Shannon admitted that, too. He was terrifically pleased that Gus Vogel seemed somehow to have achieved the desired results, though he did not yet know the process. Vogel himself was still registered at the Commercial House. A phone call had elicited this information, though it had not produced Vogel himself. Shannon made a mental note to raise Vogel's salary. He looked at a closed, solid-paneled door beyond Kronjager. "The sarge outside said Whitey Loop was in."

"Unh-hunh." Kronjager got laboriously to his feet and went over to the closed door. "Shannon's out here, Chief." Apparently satisfied that he had been heard he started back for the desk, had another thought and headed for the water cooler in the corner. When he was directly opposite Shannon he was struck by still another thought. He hit Shannon a full-armed blow in the mouth. Shannon sat down. He was still sitting there when Chief of Police Floyd Loop came out of the inner office.

"Well!" Loop said cheerfully, and again, "Well, well!" He was very handsome in blue pin-striped gabardine. His champagne-colored hair glistened in the sun. He looked at Kronjager. "You shouldn't have done that, Lew. Mr. Shannon is our guest."

Shannon pushed himself groggily to his feet and stood there swaying slightly. A little blood came out of his mouth and dyed his chin. "If you really want me to

get out of town," he said carefully, "you're using the wrong tactics." His voice sounded as though he had a mouthful of mush.

Loop's eyes got a surprised look. "Is that a threat?" Shannon remembered the gun in the waistband of his pants. He pretended to be looking for a handkerchief in his pockets, but when he had accurately gauged the distance between himself and Kronjager he took out the gun, took two swift steps and used the gun to knock Kronjager cold. He was surprised when the gun seemed to leap from his hand of its own accord. Shock numbed his fingers and ran up his arm clear to the shoulder. It was only then that he heard the shot.

He looked stupidly at Whitey Loop. The handsome man was just tucking an automatic back into his shoulder clip. "Now," Loop said pleasantly, "now we can have a comfy little chat." He went over and kicked Kronjager in the ribs. "Time to wake up, Lew."

KRONJAGER did not wake up. He didn't even groan. Shannon licked his lips. "You'd better keep him off me," he said thickly. He went over to the water cooler and rinsed his mouth out. A slightly swollen tongue explored the inside of his teeth. There seemed to be none missing.

Loop frowned down at the slowly reviving Kronjager. "You can't blame Lew for being sore, at that," he said. "Somebody told him Pilsudski wanted you to find out about the bus and report to nobody but him."

Shannon spat. "I told you Pilsudski asked if I had any ideas."

Loop nodded. "But you didn't tell me it was to be a secret." The irises of his cat eyes seemed to grow larger. "We don't like that kind of secrets in Las Cruces, Shannon."

From the tail of his eye Shannon saw Kronjager furtively stretch out a hand toward the fallen gun. Still watching Loop he managed to step on the hand. "Be nice, Lew." He bent and scooped up the gun and dropped it into the side pocket of his topcoat. Kronjager sat up. His congested eyes were murderous. "This town isn't going to be big enough for both of us, Irish."

Shannon looked at him. "Did Whitey Loop tell you to sock me?"

"No."

Loop began to laugh. "Sure I did, Lew." He sat down at the desk, being very careful of the creases in his trousers. "We've been giving you plenty of rope, Shannon, but like I said, the time has come for us to have a quiet little chat." He waved a white, well-kept hand. "I had Lew soften you up a little just to give you an idea that we mean business."

Shannon massaged some of the puffiness out of his lower lip. "What do you want to know?"

Loop's hands built a church and steeple. His eyes were direct. "You saw Rygaard and MacLeish this morning. What did you talk about?"

Shannon had the distinct impression that he was about to begin walking a tightrope and that he had better walk carefully. Sparring for time, he said, "It was Vogel saw Rygaard."

"All right," Loop said impatiently. "What did Vogel and Rygaard talk about?"

"About checking the Consolidated's old records for a man named Johann Smith."

Loop sighed. "So we're back to that again."

Shannon became violently angry. "What else is there?" He waved his hands. "If you don't believe me, ask Rygaard. Ask Giles MacLeish."

"And Mrs. Thorelsen?" Loop suggested.

Shannon's stomach was suddenly as cold as ice. He did not know how Loop had found out about Wynn, but it was obvious that he had. He took a deep breath. "Mrs. Thorelsen is an old friend," he admitted. "I told her I'd see what I could do."

Loop's mouth curled pleasantly. "That's better." He looked at Kronjager who had finally got up off the floor. "You see, Lew? Mr. Shannon is going to be quite reasonable after all."

"I tell you you don't know him!" Kronjager yelled. He wiped his mouth on the back of a hand. "No matter what he says, this guy has got more curves than the Venus de Milo. Pin him down on Johann Smith and you get Mrs. Thorelsen. Pin him down on her and you'll get something else." He seemed in imminent danger of choking to death. "I tell you—"

Loop silenced him with a gesture. His

golden cat eyes played on Shannon's face. "What do you think about Mrs. Thorelsen's story, Shannon?"

"I think she's hysterical," Shannon said. Now that the first plunge was over he thought he saw a way to work even this to his advantage. He spread his hands. "I thought so in the first place, but I owed her something for old times' sake. So I sent Vogel up." He scowled. "If you guys had left him alone he'd have wound it up and everybody would have been happy."

"Yes," Loop said gently. He looked without affection at Kronjager's bulk. "That was Lew's fault. He got a little too impressed with his own importance, didn't you, Lew?"

Kronjager grunted. "You'll find out."

"Yes," Loop said, "I think I will, Lew." His voice took on a nice sharp edge. "I think I'm going to find out a lot of things. I think Mr. Shannon is going to tell me." He uncoiled his length with the lithe suppleness of a cat. "How about it, copper?"

That last word was a giveaway. If Shannon hadn't guessed it before, that "Copper" and the way Loop said it would have told him that loop had no more business in a police office than a snake has wings. He wondered where Giles MacLeish had been able to pick up such a man for ordinary bodyguard duty. He said, "I take it that there is something you want me to do."

"Right," Loop agreed. He looked at Kronjager. "Go out and buy yourself a drink, Lew."

Kronjager turned beet red. "I tell you you're making a mistake, Floyd." Nevertheless he went toward the door, hesitated, finally opened it and went out. A red sun dyed the office with a last flaming blaze, then dipped out of sight beyond the peaks. Suddenly it was quite cold in the room. Loop waited till the silence was almost insufferable. "Shannon."

"Unh-hunh?"

"Who threw that dynamite at you?"

"I don't know." This was not quite the truth. Not any longer. Shannon thought that he did know, though he did not yet know the reason, nor what he was going to do about it.

"Then find out," Loop said. His voice cut through the gloom, low but incisive.

"I've got a good thing in this town. I'm going to have a better." He pretended to examine his nails. "Play along with me and maybe I'll cut you in."

Again something that could have been avarice glowed in Shannon's eyes. "All right."

"Of course I'll be watching you," Loop said.

Shannon nodded. "That's okay by me."

Loop stood up. His face was as smooth and clear-cut as a cameo. "I have ways of finding out things, Shannon. I proved that to you in the matter of Mrs. Thorelsen." He found a cigarette and lit it. "So you can be working on her or on Johann Smith or any damned thing you please." He blew a perfectly round smoke ring at the ceiling. "Just so I know that you're really working for me."

"All right," Shannon said.

Loop blew another smoke ring. "And if I find you holding out," he said pleasantly. "I'll make you wish you'd never heard of Las Cruces."

IX

THE valley was a green bowl, and though the sun had set there was still enough light to see the reflection of towering peaks in the tiny emerald lake at the valley's lowermost point. Bordering the lake there was a golf course and what looked to be a rather elaborate country club, and there was a scattering of substantial houses, and pretty houses; houses set apart, as were the people who lived in them, like jewels in a Tiffany window.

Carmen MacLeish waved a modishly gloved hand. "Nob Hill," she said. She wore a dove-gray suit with a touch of scarlet at the throat, and there was a scarlet feather in her gray felt hat, and her bag was scarlet, and the Cadillac convertible, and her mouth. The mouth *fascinated* Shannon. He kept wanting to crush his own against it. He was glad that Miss Frances McGowan was no longer in town. "Beautiful," he said.

Green eyes considered him. "Nob Hill?"

He shook his head. "You."

She made a faintly deprecating gesture, not denying her beauty, but dismissing it

as unimportant. She pointed. "The mausoleum is ours."

Shannon looked across the valley at the mausoleum. It was in truth a somewhat pretentious house for so far-flung an outpost. From a promontory overlooking the lake it rose to a full three stories of cut-stone grandeur, lacking only a moat and drawbridge to make it practically a feudal hall. Shannon remembered that Giles MacLeish had been born in a shack made out of flattened kerosene tins.

Carmen MacLeish seemed able to read his mind at will. "Giles is an eighth Indian," she said. "Sometimes it comes out in atrocities like that one."

Shannon admired her. "And you're Pocahontas?"

"A sixteenth," she said shortly. The Cadillac was motionless beside the road leading in from the highway. "I might have been Lady St. Cyr if I could have stood him long enough." She considered that. "Or if he could have stood me." She turned in the seat and looked at Shannon from beneath long lashes. "I'm not a very nice person, Shannon." Quite suddenly her gloved hands clenched into fists. "I hate things!"

He put an arm around her. "What things, hon?"

She shivered. "How do I know? Everything. That damned house down there, and this town, and myself—everything."

He could feel her pulling at him, not physically, but like a drug, like a shot of novocaine after the first shock of the needle is over and you start to grow numb. "Why don't you get out of it?"

"The town?" She lay back against his arm. "I've tried that and I always come back." She half closed her eyes. "Giles needs me." After a while she said, very low, "What did Giles tell you, Shannon?"

His eyes hardened. "I'm supposed to find out something for him, that's all."

"And are you going to do it?"

"I don't know."

She stirred a little. "You think I did it, don't you?"

Shannon was startled. "Did what?"

"Tried to wreck the bus."

Shannon did not have to pretend to be angry. He really was. He removed his arm from the back of the seat. "If I thought that," he said levelly, "I'd take

your pretty throat in my two hands and let you have it right now." He drew a deep breath. "That still holds if I ever find out it was you."

She nodded as if she had quite expected that. "You saw Loop this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"And what did you find out?"

Shannon laughed. "That he is beautiful, darling." He turned suddenly burning eyes on her. "Though not as beautiful as you."

She sighed. "We always come back to that, don't we?"

"Well, shouldn't we?"

"I suppose so," she said. She leaned toward him. "We might as well get the first part over with." Her lips parted, scarlet, receptive, inviting. Her eyes were wide open.

Shannon kissed her. He could not have done anything else. If she had had a knife in each hand, and intended to bury them both in his back, he could not have done anything else. After a while he pushed her away.

Over her head he saw that another car had come abreast of them and that both of the occupants were pretending they hadn't seen a thing. It was Mr. George St. Cyr who was driving. Beside him sat the lady who was supposed to have left town, Miss Frances McGowan.

X

SHANNON let himself quietly into the service porch of the Thorelsen bungalow and stood there a moment looking back over the way he had come. It was very dark now. So far as he could tell he had not been observed, though it was not this that worried him so much as the identity of the observer, if any. Indeed he had come to the conclusion that there was little or no use attempting further secrecy; it was time to start shoving people around on his own account. It was evident that the normal methods of investigation weren't going to get him anywhere in Las Cruces; there were too many conflicting forces. All he could do—all he could hope to do—was to use these forces to his own advantage, to add a little fuel here and there until something boiled over.

When presently he turned to the inner

door, the kitchen door, he saw that it had already opened, and Wynn Thorelsen was a perfumed shadow against the lighter shadows of the kitchen. "Hello, Wynn." He remembered the perfume. It was, he thought, Black Narcissus. He saw that she had a gun. "You can put it down now, hon."

"I—I wasn't sure it was you." She swayed toward him. "Oh, Shan, it's good to see you again!"

He laughed briefly. "We Shannons are a tough lot." He pushed her ahead of him into the kitchen. Light from the hall came in and showed him that she had not finished dressing. He had a brief vision of black lace scanties and firm white flesh before she drew the robe closer about her. Her eyes were in shadow, but her coppery hair and the rest were as he had remembered it. "You're a beautiful woman, Wynn."

She shrugged.

"But silly," he said. He caught her shoulders in his two hands and shook her violently. "How do you expect me to work if you're going to go off half-cocked?"

All the blood drained out of her face, leaving the rouge two ragged splotches of color on alabaster. "What—what did I do?"

"You came snooping around when I was in the hospital, that's what!" His eyes glowed angrily. "For a while I thought it was Vogel tipped them off, but it wasn't. It was you."

She lifted her face then and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. "You think I could stay away when I knew what had happened? When I knew that it was on my account?" When his face did not change she let her shoulders droop. "I'm sorry, Shan."

"Forget it," he said roughly. He took off his hat and ran fingers through his thick dark hair. "Look, I'm stymied unless I can find a motive for this kill." He sensed the sudden tightening of her body. "I'm sorry to have to put it so brutally, hon. It must be this goddam town."

Some of the color came back into her face. "It's quite all right."

"Well, then, how about it? Why should Rygaard—why should anybody—have wanted him dead?" He put an arm out to steady her. "Look, Wynn, if I can't

talk to you in plain English we might as well forget the whole thing."

She drew in a quivery breath. "I'm sorry." After a while she said in a perfectly controlled voice, "All I can tell you is that the night it happened, at dinner, Bill was terribly excited about something. He didn't say anything. I—I just knew it."

Shannon's eyes narrowed. "And he went back to the mine after dinner?"

"Yes."

He shrugged. "That's all you know?"

"Yes."

"I've found out one thing that doesn't make your hunch look so good. Rygaard was supposed to be down at Safford that night, about some trouble with the railroad."

"So he said."

Shannon nodded. "Naturally that could be faked, and I'll look into it, but—" He whirled on her savagely. "But why? Why should Rygaard kill a man who was on his side—working for him?"

Quite suddenly she sat down. "There's something I've got to tell you, Shan. I haven't before because it's—well, it's almost inconceivable that he—that anybody should think I'd—" Again her face became as white and hard as marble, but her voice was quite steady. "Rygaard is in love with me, Shan."

SHANNON stared. "The hell he is!" He became violently angry. "Well, why didn't you tell me that before?"

She dabbed at her lips with a tiny black-bordered handkerchief. The robe had fallen open again and he saw that her stockings were black too. He was a sucker for black stockings. He tried to keep his mind on his work. She said, "It was just one of those things. Rygaard was Bill's employer. It was good business to be nice to him."

Shannon was incredulous. "And he figured that the only way he could get you was to make you a widow?" He made his laugh purposely harsh. "Not that you aren't about the most attractive one I've seen." He watched her eyes. "Try again, hon."

She shivered. "That's not very kind of you, Shan, reminding me that once I

wasn't so hard to get." Her eyes chided him.

"I'm not here to be kind," he said nastily. "At least not in a maudlin sort of way." He pointed a finger at her. "I thought you wanted me to find out something. I thought you were a good hater."

It was she who was angry now. "All right, so I'm telling you. I loved my husband. That other was over and done with. Bill knew it and Rygaard found it out later." She stood up. "No matter what you think, neither Rygaard nor anybody else could have got to first base as long as Bill was alive." Even white teeth bit at her lower lip. "Figure it out for yourself. The alleged suicide, the blackening of Bill's reputation, the woman—all could have been intended to make me forget him as soon as possible."

Shannon's smile was unpleasant. "So you've waited all this time to tell me!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Have you forgotten that I've had a robbery?"

"I haven't forgotten anything!" Shannon snarled. "That's the hell of it. Just about the time you think you've got your teeth into something solid something else pops up and makes it look silly." He tore at his hair. "What's all this got to do with Giles MacLeish and Whitey Loop and Mueller and a guy named Pilsudski? What are they all afraid of?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"Then what were they after—whatever it was that prowled this dump? What did Thorelsen have that somebody wants?"

She didn't know that either. She bared her wrist and looked at her tiny watch. "I'm dining out, Shan." Evidently she felt that an explanation for this was necessary, for she said uncertainly, "You told me I should start circulating again."

"Sure." He was oppressed with the feeling that there was still something she hadn't told him. "Who with, Rygaard?"

Her breasts rose and fell unevenly. "With Giles MacLeish."

He began to laugh. "Don't tell me MacLeish is a prospective suitor too!"

Her gray eyes studied him. "Would you care?" She moved her shoulders in the old provocative way. "In a town like this, women—good-looking women—are scarce. MacLeish is a widower and lonely."

Shannon's eyes were suddenly very bright. "Maybe MacLeish did it."

"Killed Bill?" She was not as startled as she might have been. "It's possible. Anything is, in this town."

"And how does our lovely Carmen feel about you?"

"She doesn't like me," Wynn admitted. She appeared to consider that. "I suppose that's perfectly natural. Children aren't fond of having their parents remarry."

"Imagine that!" Shannon said in an awed voice. He was intrigued by the picture of Giles MacLeish and Wolfgang Rygaard locked in a struggle over nothing more than this woman before him. He said, "Well, just on the off chance that it isn't your own sweet self that everybody is after, here's something we can do to maybe stimulate a little action around here." He put on his hat. "Give me the keys to the garage."

She looked at him as though she suspected him of being slightly drunk. "What on earth for?"

"I'm going to find something in Thorelson's car," Shannon said. "Maybe somebody will see me find it."

"But there isn't anything!"

"Then I'll have to take something out to the garage with me." He snapped his fingers. "Get me some old envelopes, a book, anything. And some brown paper and string." He looked at her. "I don't suppose our prowlers thought of the garage?"

"No."

"Then that's where we'll find it," he decided.

"What?"

He was seized with a sudden fit of silent laughter. "You're as bad as Gus Vogel." And then, reminded of her question: "How do I know? Maybe the secret map of a gold mine."

XI

IN THE public dining room of the country club Shannon ate hugely of top sirloin and shoestring potatoes and hot rolls and cheese. Rather conspicuously displayed for what purported to be something of great value was a bulky Manila envelope tied with red tape. Shannon hoped that someone might see it and think him even a greater fool than he was. He wondered if Giles MacLeish, for instance,

thought him a fool; and Wolfgang Rygaard and Whitey Loop. But most of all he wondered about Wynn Thorelson. Wynn's most recent disclosures, and her new manner, worried him no end. He could not make up his mind about her.

A man came through the arch from Ye Olde English Taproom and stood there a moment surveying the scattered diners. He was of medium height, and slender, and quietly well dressed in gray. Thinning sandy hair was parted neatly in the center, and beneath a slightly acquisitive nose was a neatly trimmed mustache. His mouth had the positive quality of a steel trap. Having tabulated each and every other person in the room to his complete satisfaction his eyes finally came to rest on Shannon. Directly, yet without hurry, he crossed to Shannon's table. You had the impression that everything he did was direct and without hurry, and so very efficient that it scared you. He placed the fingers of both hands on the edge of the table, like the Chairman of the Board about to address his directors. "You're Shannon," he stated.

Shannon could not deny this. He nodded. "Uuh-huh."

"I'm Rygaard."

They stared at each other for a long moment. Neither offered to shake hands. Shannon decided that Gus Vogel had not exaggerated the gimlet-like quality of Wolfgang Rygaard's eyes. He thought that probably Rygaard knew him. Shannon was flitted with a mild return of the electric shocks occasioned by the explosion of last night. He pushed out a chair. "Sit down."

"Thank you." Rygaard accepted the chair. When the Mexican waiter returned with coffee, Rygaard decided that he, too, would have a cup. Meticulously he clipped the end from a thin dappled cigar, meticulously lit it. A lifted eyebrow asked Shannon if he would like a cigar. Shannon chose a cigarette instead. Presently Rygaard said, "I suggested to your Mr. Vogel that I might have employment in your line."

"Who hasn't?" Shannon muttered. He pointed a finger. "Look, anybody else in this town wants to hire me has got to tell me the score." Twin streams of angry smoke issued from his nostrils. He looked

rather like an irate fire horse on a wintry morning call. "I'm getting damned sick of all this fiddle-faddle." He banged his coffee cup down. "You want to hire a private eye, say so, and just leave out all the innuendoes. Tell me what you want done in plain black and white and I'll answer you yes or no."

Mr. Rygaard was apparently unaffected by this outburst. "Put in black and white," he said gently, "your first job would be to kill Whitey Loop."

SHANNON almost choked on a lungful of smoke. "Well, that's black-and-white enough for anybody, isn't it?"

Mr. Rygaard nodded gravely. "Yes."

Shannon appeared to consider the proposition. It needed consideration. Not that he intended to accommodate Mr. Rygaard, though he would not have minded killing Whitey Loop on his own account. The point was, did Rygaard really want Loop knocked off, or was this a rather clumsy attempt to test Shannon's reaction to the suggestion? Was it not possible, indeed, that Whitey Loop had himself instigated this approach? If you believed Giles MacLeish, Whitey might easily have switched his allegiance and thrown in with Rygaard. And if you did not believe Giles MacLeish, then where were you? So far as his own personal affairs were concerned, Shannon had the uncomfortable feeling that he could stand in the middle of Front Street with his eyes closed and spray Las Cruces with a hail of lead and be sure of hitting nobody but enemies. He said, almost regretfully, "The answer is no."

"Not even for ten thousand dollars?"

Shannon shook his head. "Not for a hundred grand."

Rygaard became deeply interested in the ash accumulating on the end of his cigar. "Afraid?"

"My gun isn't for hire," Shannon said shortly.

"But suppose he were a murderer," the calm voice persisted.

"I still wouldn't be interested," Shannon said. "Not without due process of law." This last, though a trifle didactic, made him feel virtuous as hell. After a while curiosity prompted him to ask, "Whose murder?"

Rygaard shrugged. "I could name you

half a dozen." Eyes with all the warmth of ball bearings probed Shannon's face. "But specifically, shall we say Thorelsen's?"

Shannon's stomach quivered. It was not that everybody in town seemed to know what he was doing even better than he did; it was Wolfgang Rygaard's seeming capacity for utter quiet. There was a hint of ruthlessness in it that was infinitely more frightening than Whitey Loop's dexterity with a gun. Shannon was scared. Even to himself he admitted that he was scared. He tried to mask this with a laugh that was as false as the theory that only the good die young. "What makes you think that wasn't suicide?"

"I knew Thorelsen," Rygaard said.

Shannon was reminded that these were almost the exact words that Wynn had used. He crushed out his cigarette, carefully. "A lot of good that is." It occurred to him that if he were Mr. Rygaard, and in love with Wynn Thorelsen, and suspected by her of complicity in the murder of her husband, it would be the natural thing to try to saddle the job on someone else. He had a little difficulty imagining Wolfgang Rygaard in love with anybody. The guy was as cold as ice. He resorted to truth in all its purity. "All right, I'll admit Mrs. Thorelsen asked me to look into it." He spread his hands. "Personally I think she's about ninety per cent hysterical."

Rygaard smiled. "Do I strike you as being hysterical, too?"

"Well, no," Shannon conceded. "Just the same," he argued, "you've got to give me more than a hunch to get me excited." He drank thirstily of his coffee. "What was the motive?" He enlarged on that. "On the cops they train you to look for the motive first. I used to be a cop."

"I know," Rygaard said. He gave you the impression that he did, too. You felt that he had investigated your dossier clear back to Aunt Minnie. "For a motive I give you the same one responsible for all the other attacks on Las Cruces Consolidated. MacLeish will never be satisfied till he owns Las Cruces, lock, stock and barrel."

Shannon lidded his eyes. "I understand he damned near does."

"But only through Loop," Rygaard said.

He appeared to make up his mind about something. "I ran a man named Pilsudski against him in the last election. To be absolutely fair I allowed MacLeish to retain a position on the Council." He laid his cigar down. "After all, the town depends on, and revolves around, the two mines and the smelter. Pilsudski appointed me. We agreed on two merchants who presumably were unbiased."

Shannon nodded. So far, the stories tallied.

"It presently developed," Rygaard went on, "that they were not unbiased." He frowned. "They couldn't be." He opened and closed a fist. "Whitey Loop simply used the old racket tactics. The merchants each had a couple of accidents. After that they voted exactly the way they were told." His bleak eyes rested intently on the Manila envelope with all the red tape. "You see?"

"I see why you want Loop knocked off," Shannon admitted. He watched Rygaard light a fresh cigar. "That shouldn't be hard to arrange in this town."

"I tried arranging it," Rygaard said. He said it as calmly, as dispassionately as though confessing sponsoring a chain letter. "Twice."

Shannon stared. "What happened?"

Rygaard permitted himself a faint gesture of annoyance. "Loop is still alive, isn't he?" He sighed. "The others aren't."

Shannon's laugh was pure bravado. "And you're electing me for the third try?" He shook his head. "Unh-unh. No, thanks."

Rygaard stood up. "Then I'm afraid I shall have to count you among my enemies, Mr. Shannon." Again he sighed. "I'm sorry."

Shannon was sorry, too. He felt that if it were possible for him to select his adversaries in whatever game it was that they all were playing, he most certainly would not choose Mr. Wolfgang Rygaard. He licked his lips. "Now wait a minute, let's get this straight. You and MacLeish hate each other's guts. Each of you wants control of the town and presumably the territory. Why?"

Under the close-clipped mustache Rygaard's mouth made an uncompromising line. "It is my business to get copper out of the Consolidated. Anything that inter-

feres with that program becomes my business, too." He shrugged. "Think it over, Mr. Shannon." He turned abruptly and disappeared through the arch into the bar. When he again appeared he had his hat and topcoat on, and there were two men behind him. One of them, a gorilla with buck teeth and the general aspect of Mortimer Snerd, stared briefly across the dining room at Shannon. You had the feeling that he was fixing Shannon's face indelibly on his memory. The three men passed from sight.

SHANNON was already well into his third drink when Miss Frances McGowan came through the main entrance. She appeared to have brought with her a considerable portion of her somewhat extensive wardrobe. She had on an ermine evening cape, and beneath that was a pale green satin creation which must have cost her, even with the discount, something like two hundred dollars. A faultlessly dinner-jacketed Whitey Loop was her escort. They made a handsome couple. They made, in fact, a beautiful couple. Shannon was furious. Maliciously conscious of this, Miss McGowan approached with undulant grace. "Dar-ling!"

Shannon glared at her. "Off with the old, on with the new." As if by accident he draped his napkin over the Manila envelope. "Where's St. Cyr?"

"St. Cyr?" Frances pretended to have a little difficulty remembering just who St. Cyr was. "Oh, him!" Gloved fingertips tapped her lips, conveying the impression that St. Cyr had only bored her. "The last I saw of him he was being carried into a Turkish bath. Into Abdullah's Turkish Baths." She tucked a hand intimately beneath Whitey Loop's arm. "Chief Loop is helping me with a story."

Shannon was outraged. "I thought that was St. Cyr."

She shook her head. "This is a different story." She giggled. "Chief Loop used to be a gangster. Isn't that cute?"

Loop himself did not look particularly cute. He looked as though he would like to wring Fran's neck, or Shannon's, or somebody's. He said, "What did Rygaard want of you?"

"He wanted me to kill you," Shannon said. He derived a certain amount of sat-



Rygaard

isfaction from thus being able to tell the unvarnished truth. If Loop himself had put Rygaard up to making the suggestion, this ought to prove to him, Loop, that Shannon was nothing if not honest. And if it were Rygaard's own idea, there was still no harm done. Loop probably knew it anyway, and the same thing applied. "He thinks you're a bad influence on the town."

"A lot he cares about the town," Loop sneered. He patted his nice golden hair much as a woman would have done. The gun in his shoulder clip hardly showed at all. "I take it that you refused him?"

"Yes."

Loop smiled then. "That was smart, Shannon. Keep on being smart and you and I'll get along just fine."

Frances had been silent for too long. "Isn't this exciting? I mean, Las Cruces and all?" She shivered deliciously. "I think I'll write a book about it."

Shannon's eyes were harried. "I thought you had left town."

"Oh, no." She considered that. "Well, I did think about it, but when I discovered this darling country club and all the"—her hand caressed Loop's sleeve—"the nice people—" She broke off to stare across the now-crowded dining room to where Giles MacLeish and Wynn Thorelsen were just being seated. "Who is that?"

"Some of our best people," Shannon said. He had the feeling that Fran McGowan knew perfectly well who they were. He thought he detected a curiously predatory look in Whitey Loop's eyes as they rested on the couple. He wondered if maybe Loop wasn't interested in Wynn, too. He scowled at Frances. "What did you do with Vogel?"

"Gussie?" She was startled. "Goodness, I forgot all about Gussie!"

Loop's mouth drooped. "He's still at the Commercial House."

"That's fine," Shannon snarled. "That's just dandy!" He looked at Miss McGowan. "And you?"

A wave of her hand described the club and its environs. "Oh, I'm stopping here." Her brown eyes mocked him. "That lush St. Cyr got me a visitor's card."

Shannon stood up violently, thrust the table away from him, found a crumpled five in his pocket and hurled it on top of his dinner check. He caught up his coat and hat and was halfway to the door before he remembered the Manila envelope. Whitey Loop was coming toward him, holding it out. "I think you forgot this."

Shannon snatched it. "Thanks!"

"Don't mention it," Loop said politely. His pleasantly musical laugh followed Shannon across the room.

Shannon's ears were still burning when he debouched into the night and looked around for a cab. A pudgy shadow detached itself from some shrubbery beside the drive. "Is that you, John J.?"

Shannon cursed. "Who else?"

Vogel was complacent. "Well, I done like you said, John J. I got Miss McGowan out of town."

Shannon was speechless.

"It was easy," Vogel continued. "Just like shooting fish."

XII

IN THE Elite Cafe Shannon watched St. Cyr and Vogel divide a double porterhouse. He himself had coffee. The booth had curtains on it, but he did not bother to close them. At the counter he saw Lew Kronjager wolfing a platter of ham and eggs, and there were half a dozen sloppy-looking cops in uniform. The rest of the patrons were obviously from the

mines or smelter. After a while he leaned across the table and addressed St. Cyr. "Is there any law in this country besides Whitey Loop?"

"Sheriff," St. Cyr said. "Prosecutor."
"Honest?"

St. Cyr regarded him. "What is honesty?"

"The legal mind at work," Shannon sneered. He gnawed at his knuckles. "I didn't ask you for a dissertation on ethics. I asked you a simple question."

"Political honesty," St. Cyr announced, "is the capacity to evaluate your own worth to the community and not steal more than that."

"That's cynical," Vogel said.

Shannon cursed him. "Did you ever figure out how big a stork it would take to carry an eight-pound baby?" He pointed a finger at St. Cyr's nose. "Look, I want to know if there's anybody in this lousy county I can take some evidence to and get a fair roll of the dice." He scowled. "I need protection."

Vogel almost choked on a piece of steak.

"Well, I do," Shannon insisted. With the handle of a knife he drew patterns on the tablecloth. "Our local police department apparently hasn't been able to find out who used a rifle on the bus, or who tossed that stick of dynamite through my window." His eyes looked sleepy. "Maybe they don't want to find out."

St. Cyr sat up a little straighter. "Am I to understand that you know who did those things?"

"Not the bus," Shannon said. "Not yet." He laid the knife down and looked across the room at the back of Kronjager's neck. "The dynamite, I think so." He frowned. "Trouble is, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with what I'm working on."

St. Cyr moistened his lips. He put out a hand for the bottle at Shannon's elbow, thought better of it. "I take it that Johann Smith is something of a myth?"

"A figment of Vogel's imagination," Shannon admitted.

Vogel denied this. "Now look, John J., it wasn't me that—"

"Shut up," Shannon said irritably. He stared intently at St. Cyr. "Funny you wouldn't know why I'm here. Everybody else seems to." He picked up the knife

again. "Mrs. Thorelsen asked me to look into her husband's murder."

"Suicide," St. Cyr said.

Shannon shook his head. "Murder."

"Proof?"

"I can get it," Shannon said. "All I want to be sure of is that I'm not wasting my time—that it will be used."

St. Cyr stood up. "Let's go over to Corona," he said.

XIII

THE country seat turned out to be a mining town too. It was cleaner than Las Cruces, possibly because it had had more room to expand. The two or three cops that Shannon saw looked decently conscious of their uniforms. He breathed a little sigh of relief.

Gus Vogel, driving the rented car as carefully as though it were his own, occasionally asked directions of George St. Cyr. St. Cyr himself, having failed to wheedle another drink out of Shannon, sat wedged between the two, a white-haired martyr touched with dignity. His bony, tweed-clad knees rubbed the dashboard. After a while he said, "Turn left here," and they entered a tree-lined street of moderately pretentious houses.

Vogel brought the car to a halt beside a curb paralleling an iron picket fence in which there were wrought-iron gates. Shannon got out, permitting St. Cyr to do likewise. "No drinks, mind you."

St. Cyr nodded. "Right."

"And no names until you are sure."

"Right." St. Cyr went through the iron gates and up a gravel drive. Shannon got back into the car. "I may want you to go down to Safford," he informed Vogel presently.

Vogel was indignant. "Why?"

"Check up on Rygaard," Shannon said. He was very careful to make this sound important, which indeed it could very well be. He wished he could think of some method as efficacious to rid himself of that other incubus, Miss Frances McGowan. "Rygaard is supposed to have been in Safford the night Thorelsen was killed. Find out."

Vogel pursed his small mouth. "You think he did it?"

"How do I know?" Shannon demanded.

After a time he said, grudgingly, "I've got a motive of sorts. If Wynn Thorelsen isn't lying."

Vogel was startled. "You think she is?"

"Women are unpredictable," Shannon announced sententiously. He brooded on this. His dark face was sullen. "Especially widows who carry their mourning as far as black lace panties."

St. Cyr came out of the tall brick house. A car came by, a closed car without lights, and for just a moment Shannon stiffened. The car did not pause. Shannon relaxed.

St. Cyr was still being aloof and dignified. "He is interested. I couldn't get him to admit more than that."

"All right," Shannon said, "let's go up." The three of them went up the drive and were ushered by a colored maid into a big room with a fireplace.

A MAN who looked like Abraham Lincoln rose from behind a carved mahogany desk.

St. Cyr performed the introductions. "Mr. Shannon, Mr. Vogel—Prosecutor Dawes."

They shook hands all around. Shannon took off his hat and laid it on the desk. "I don't know how much my attorney has told you, but I understand you're running for re-election presently. I've got or can get information which can kill you or make the election a sure thing. If I went to the papers, or your opponent, it would probably result in your political death." He assumed a righteous look. "I've come to you instead."

Dawes' voice was resonant. "Threats, Mr. Shannon?"

Shannon scowled. "All I want is an opportunity to work."

"At what?"

"St. Cyr told you," Shannon said. "I came up here to investigate a murder that was passed off as suicide. There have been two attempts on my life. Before that, Mr. Vogel here was beaten up and intimidated in an attempt to get him to leave Las Cruces. My client has had a robbery. No arrests have been made in any of these affairs." He bent angry eyes on the Lincolnnesque face beyond the desk. "What does that suggest to you?"

A large calloused hand massaged a large ugly chin. Dawes' eyes were a little angry,

too. "Las Cruces is an incorporated city, Mr. Shannon."

"In your county."

The prosecutor sighed a little. "My office prosecutes the cases that are brought to it, on the evidence adduced." He moved his spare shoulders impatiently. "Granted that Las Cruces is a sore spot, that trouble over there inevitably spreads to the whole county—" He broke off to stare without affection at St. Cyr. "Mr. Shannon is from a big city, Counselor. Perhaps he doesn't understand that some of us do not have the money to maintain a separate staff of investigators."

St. Cyr said nothing whatever to this. Shannon said, "I'm offering you—for free—a staff of investigators that you couldn't buy, even if you had the money."

"Why?"

Shannon's mouth became unpleasant. "Because the case I am working on seems to be all tangled up with about a dozen other cases. If I lift even one little corner I'm liable to smear the whole works." He thrust his hands deep into his pants pockets and took to pacing the room. "There are too many people afraid of too many things to like that."

Dawes built a church and steeple of his knobby brown fingers. "I have the feeling, Mr. Shannon, that you'd like to do just that—rip Las Cruces wide open."

"What do you care?" Shannon's eyes smoldered. "Played right, it might even make your governor." He laughed. "Played wrong, you might have to go back to work for a living."

"Yes," Dawes said. A little laugh rumbled in his own throat. "There is always that, isn't there?" He thrust his chair back and put his hands on his knees, Lincoln posing for a portrait. "Just what do you want, Mr. Shannon?"

"Protection. If I land in jail, which I probably will, I want my attorney to be able to get me out. If I produce criminal evidence I want it used. If I want to investigate certain parties I'll need authority". He grinned crookedly. "I used to be a cop, Mr. Dawes. Sometimes I miss that badge like nobody's business."

"Meaning you want one from me?"

"It would help," Shannon confessed.

Dawes shook his head. "No."

If he were disappointed Shannon didn't

let it show. "All right, I can get along without it."

The prosecutor cleared his throat. "Now we come to the matter of evidence. If you have any why didn't you take it to Lundy, by Las Cruces deputy?"

Shannon looked at Vogel. "Tell him, Dutch."

Vogel screwed his face into a semblance of sorrow. "I hate to say this, but I'm afraid your—now—Mr. Lundy ain't quite honest." He coughed apologetically. "I seen as crooked a cop as ever lived—a guy by the name of Lew Kronjager—pass him a hatful of nice new currency." He sighed. "In the back room of a cigar store on Front Street."

Dawes let out a yelp at that.

"That's what I meant," Shannon nodded. "That's the kind of thing that would kill you if I took it to the wrong people." He was very careful not to tighten the screws too hard. "And it's the kind of thing that will make you—if you hit 'em first." He waited while the new Lincoln wrestled with the problem.

"I could fire Lundy," Dawes said, half to himself. He looked from beneath beetling brows at St. Cyr. "How would you like to be a deputy prosecutor?"

"He wouldn't like it," Shannon said. "He'd probably get himself shot the first day in office."

Dawes made up his mind. "This thing is dynamite, Mr. Shannon. You'll have to watch your step." He coughed. "Any illegal acts, if condoned by me, would be as fatal as—"

"Proving your incompetency?" Shannon suggested.

The prosecutor stood. "I think the expression was 'a fair roll of the dice'?"

"Unh-hunh."

"Then that's all I can guarantee you, Mr. Shannon."

XIV

FROM the doorway of a rooming house at the foot of the hill below Las Cruces Consolidated, Shannon accosted the first man who came down off the night shift. "Card, buddie?" He flipped his topcoat lapel, exposing a shiny round badge. He had borrowed the badge from a truck driver. The stamped legend was too small

for his victim to read. "Union inspector."

The man had a strong Welsh accent. "Yuss." He produced the card. It said he was a member in good standing of the Amalgamated Mine Workers and that his dues were paid up.

"By the way," Shannon said, "we're thinking of lowering the dues. Let's see, how much are you paying now?"

Cousin Jack saw nothing extraordinary in a union inspector not knowing how much a driller was assessed. He gave Shannon the information readily. Shannon dismissed him with a curt nod. "Thanks, Jack." At random he chose another man from the mob, and still another, and went through the same procedure. After about fifteen minutes of this he had found out that not all muckers paid the same dues. Notably the ones who paid more were Hunkies. Indeed the last two he questioned turned out to be fellow passengers on the bus the night before. They did not recognize Shannon. He left his doorway and went over to Front Street and the nearest telephone booth, where he put in a call for Mamie Costello in Los Angeles. When her voice answered, sleepily indignant, he said, "This is Abe Klosterholz, hon. Anybody been inquiring about me?"

Mamie was quick on the uptake. "Unh-hunh. Also about poor Mrs. Smith."

Shannon smiled. "You're sweet, hon. You didn't let 'em talk to her, I suppose?"

Mamie borrowed some of his own vocabulary. "How could I?" After a moment she said, "I couldn't give out that kind of information." Another pause, then: "Ola, Shan, are you all right?"

"You mean Abe, don't you?" He didn't think the operator was listening, but in this town you could never tell. He put his mouth down very close to the transmitter and spoke rapidly in a jargon which nobody but Mamie could have understood. "Tomorrow is time enough, hon. I'll call you then."

"Is that wench McGowan up there with you?"

"We Klosterholzes never give out that kind of information," he said.

He went out of the booth and bought himself a cigar and the latest edition of the *Clarion*. They were still running his ad for the missing Johann Smith. He

was rather sorry for Wolfgang Rygaard and Whitey Loop, who had thought to catch Mamie Costello off guard by inquiring for the non-existent wife of a non-existent Johann Smith. He went back to the phone booth and looked up a lady by the name of Mrs. Rose Machado. He did not call her. Instead, he asked the cigar clerk the way to the Avenida Juan Batista.

It turned out to be a dead-end street two blocks long and butting up against the mountain. It was no trouble at all to locate the house. A maid in prim white apron and bandeau admitted him and took his coat. She was Mexican. She was not a day over sixteen. "Ees cold out, Senor?" She had swell teeth.

Shannon admitted that it was cold. He said, casually, "Is Rose in?"

The girl looked at him. "You not been here before?" She waved toward a room at the back of the small foyer. "Ees *Rose*, singing."

Shannon followed the wave and the sound of the voice. It was a good voice. A piano was the only accompaniment. Whoever was playing it was good, too.

He came into a room that obviously had once been several rooms. Ranged along the irregular walls were tables with red-checked cloths and there was a small bar presided over by a Chinese, pigtail still intact. At each of the tables was a girl, and at some of them there was a man, too. Stairs without ornamentation climbed to some remote region above, and beneath the stairs was a three-piece string orchestra, silent now, intent as was everyone else on the woman at the piano. Shannon stood with his back to the door, breathing gently, lest even so slight a sound might disturb her. She was not beautiful. Indeed a scar along one cheek made her almost ugly. But her voice, and the way she held her head, made her magnificent. She was so magnificent that again doubt assailed him; doubt of Wynn Thorelsen and her so-called intuition. Thorelsen must have been a man of stone if this woman who called herself Rose Machado couldn't have influenced him. Shannon decided that he, Shannon, could be influenced. In fact he was, just listening to her.

The applause was genuine. Rose Machado accepted it intelligently—she knew she was good—but without condes-

cension either. She touched a red crepe handkerchief to her cheek, the one with the scar on it, and crossed the room to where Shannon stood. "You didn't clap," she said.

"No."

Sloe-black eyes studied him. She said, "I don't remember seeing you around."

"No."

The string orchestra was playing now. A few couples moved out onto the tiny dance floor. The Chinese bartender became very busy indeed. The woman's fingers made a rope of the red crepe handkerchief. "Drink?"

"I don't mind," Shannon said. They moved together along the narrow aisle bordering the dance floor. She leaned with her back to the bar.

Shannon had a momentary feeling of inability to cope with this woman's intelligence. He paid for the drinks, watched her toss hers down her throat, as a man does, quickly, so you don't have to smell it. He said, "I want to talk to you."

A small frown drew her brows together. "There is no profit in talk, amigo."

"In my kind there is," Shannon said. "Isn't there some place we could go where it's quieter?"

She studied him.

"For talk?"

He smiled into her eyes. "For talk."

"About what, amigo?"

— "About a lot of money," he said. "About maybe ten thousand dollars."

She moved her shoulders. They were bare and golden warm above the swell of her breasts. Her gown was red crepe, like the handkerchief. Below the scar on her cheek a little pulse quivered beneath the skin. "All right," she said. She turned and spoke rapidly in Mexican to the Chinese bartender. Shannon followed her up the stairs.

In the corridor above there was a series of closed doors. The woman opened one at the far end, paused to let Shannon pass her, then came in and closed it quietly behind her. He saw that here, too, a partition had been taken out, and that the room was a woman's room, comfortable without ostentation. The woman sat on the end of a chaise and looked at the fire. "I'm listening."

Shannon laughed. "I could go for you

in a big way, Machado." She appeared to consider that.

"You want to talk?"

"About money," he nodded. He took out his billfold, selected a hundred, creased it thoughtfully, finally laid it on the mantel. "Just to prove I know what I'm talking about." He sat in a chair then and lit a cigarette. "I know a gal who writes," he said after a time. "Once in a while she gets stuck on a story and it's worth money to her to get an intelligent criticism." Twin gusts of smoke issued from his nostrils. "You look pretty intelligent to me, Rose."

She touched the scar on her cheek and for a moment something that could have been anger showed far back in her eyes. "Thanks."

He crushed out his cigarette. "This guy I'm going to tell you about," he said, "could just as well have been a gal." He watched her from beneath half lowered lids. "Maybe it was just the money that made him do it, maybe it was something else, but he allowed himself to get in kind of a jam. He wasn't smart like you, Rose. He didn't figure the percentages."

She sat up a little straighter. "How much of this do I have to listen to for a hundred dollars?"

"There's always more where that came from," he said. His teeth shone whitely for an instant. "Maybe this guy figured he could get more, too. On the other hand, maybe it wasn't the money at all that mattered." He leaned forward a little. "You know what he did, Rose?"

She wouldn't look at him. "No."

"He lied about something," Shannon said. "A guy got killed and this other guy, the one I'm telling you about, was approached by the killers and told to say certain things in case he was asked." He spread his hands. "Now I'll leave it to you, was he smart to do it, or wasn't he?"

Her breasts rose and fell unevenly. "What you're trying to say is that the killers might decide to kill him, too."

"That's the idea," Shannon nodded. "If it looked like somebody was getting too interested in this guy, they might be afraid he'd sing a song."

The scar on her face had turned absolutely white. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"If I were this guy," Shannon said, "I'd

think about talking. I'd maybe talk to somebody who could offer money and protection."

The crepe handkerchief was becoming frayed in her hands, but she kept her voice quite steady. "I still don't know what you're talking about."

Shannon sighed. "Well, maybe it will come to you, Rose. In case it does, the name is Shannon and I'll be at the Navarro." He went out.

XV

THE sound of a typewriter, so late at night, pointed him unerringly to Fran McGowan's room. Fran liked to work at night.

The country club was not entirely deserted. There were half a dozen cars still parked in the drive out in front. Somewhere not too far away a couple of mocking birds sang lustily, probably to keep their teeth from chattering. There was the feel of snow in the wind which came down off the mountains and rustled the trees at Shannon's back.

Finally Shannon went over to the oblong of yellow light which was Fran's window and tapped on the glass. The clatter of the typewriter ceased. Her light went out. Presently there was the creak of a steel casement being cranked open and Fran stood there faintly outlined between him and the window drapes. "Go away."

"Listen," he said, exercising great repression, "this is no time to act like a prima donna."

"I don't care," she said. "I'm busy."

"What do you think I am?" he demanded.

She hazarded a guess. "A heel?"

He resorted to cajolery. "Look, hon—" "Well—"

Presently he stood inside the room and pulled the drapes, though he did not close the window itself. Frances turned on the lights. "I don't know what I see in you," she observed.

This was Shannon's own line and he represented her use of it. "I'm your hero, remember? The guy you came up here to save from a fate worse than death."

"There isn't any," Fran said. She had on a black Chinese silk robe with embroidered pale gold dragons. The dragons were

the same color as her hair, and even in his moment of travail Shannon had to admit she was beautiful. She sat on the straight chair before the small table on which was her portable. An index finger rattled the space bar suggestively. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

He told her. "I think I've got things started popping," he said. "This Dawes is cagy, but I think maybe he's on the level." He drew in a deep breath. "Like to do something for me, hon?"

"What?"

"Go down to Phoenix?" He explained that. "MacLeish has got a couple of good reasons to hate Pilsudski. One, Pilsudski is maybe Rygaard's puppet, but just the same he's taken MacLeish's place as mayor. Two, Pilsudski is bringing in unskilled labor and forcing it down MacLeish's throat. Carmen MacLeish had a rifle in her car and she happened along almost too opportunely."

Fran looked at him. "Did you suggest that to our estimable chief of police?"

"Would I?" He scowled. "He probably knows it anyway. He's Giles MacLeish's man."

She frowned.

"Are you sure of that?"

Still with his hands in his pockets he sat down in a slipper chair. "Well, no, come to think of it. Matter of fact, MacLeish tried to hire me to check up on Loop and Rygaard." His brows made a straight black line. "At that, I'd know better where I was if I knew whether Carmen MacLeish really was in Phoenix."

"Why don't you send Gus?"

"Vogel is on his way down to Safford," he said shortly.

Miss McGowan was not exactly a fool. "So you've finally got him out of town and now you're trying to get me out." Her very nice mouth made a very unlovely sound. "What you're really trying to do is make sure there are no strings on you when the fireworks start."

He avoided her eyes. "That's a lie." He became very earnest indeed. "It shouldn't be hard to do. You'll find somebody that knows her—a gas station maybe. She'd have had to get gas for that Cadillac." From memory he repeated the Cadillac's license number. "You can figure the time and the distance, and if she really

was in Phoenix you can almost spot her for the moment the bus went into its dance."

Fran jotted down the number. "I'll think it over."

"Thanks, hon." Shannon was relieved. He stood up and looked over her shoulder at the page in the typewriter. "Shannon," he read, "Shannon, you rat—" He was outraged. "Can't you find any other names for your heels?"

Miss McGowan regarded him kindly. "I like heels named Shannon."

Shannon was oddly affected. "I'm glad you do, hon." He bent and kissed her behind the ear. For a long time afterward he remembered that kiss, not for the emotion involved but for the fact that it probably saved his life.

Coincident with the necessary stoop there was the crash of glass from the dresser mirror, and immediately following that there was the sound of a shot. With one sweep of his arm Shannon knocked Frances and the lamp to the floor, and then, in total darkness, he ripped the drapes aside and plunged through the window.

There was nothing. There was not one single solitary sign of the potential assassin. Indeed for a long moment there was no sound. Shannon was just rising from his hands and knees when the first lights came on in the rooms to either side of him. Out on the drive there were shouts and the noise of a car being started.

He ran that way, detoured across the first green of the golf course as he saw headlights swing into the highway. The headlights pinned him there at the side of the road. Rubber screamed. The car came to a shuddering halt. He saw that it was the big red Cadillac and that Miss Carmen MacLeish was behind the wheel. She leaned over and opened the right-hand door. "Get in."

He held his gun straight out in front of him. "So it was you."

"Me?" She brushed the back of a hand across her eyes. The rouge stood out in ugly splotches on a face that had gone quite white and vacuous. "Giles and a dozen men are underground at the Resurrection. Something's happened to them." She keeled over in a dead faint in Shannon's arms.

XVI

HIS first act was not too gallant, but considering that a third attempt had just been made on his life, and probably by this very beautiful young lady in his arms, it was scarcely the time to think of true chivalry. He grasped her neck firmly in his left hand, dropped his gun and used a forefinger to poke one of her eyelids open. The eye regarded him blankly, without the slightest flicker. She had really fainted, then. He dropped her in a corner of the seat and busied himself searching the car. He found no gun. When the advance guard from the club arrived on the scene he was holding Miss MacLeish tenderly in the crook of his arm and feeding her small portions of Scotch from the bottle. "Come on, baby, take a little more now."

There were five guests and a white-jacketed club steward in the first batch. Three of the guests were women. Shannon permitted them to take charge of Carmen MacLeish. "Any of you people happen to be with her inside?"

The steward answered for all of them. "No, sir, she was all alone tonight."

"I understand there's some trouble up at the Resurrection. She mention it to any one of you?"

She had not mentioned it. "Though she did look quite ill, sir," the steward said, "when she came back from the women's lockers. There's a phone in there. Perhaps—" He broke off as some more guests and attendants arrived. Among these was Fran, a little breathless and liable to freeze to death in the Chinese silk robe.

"We heard a shot," a drunk announced belligerently. He looked around for corroboration. "Didn't we hear a shot?"

They all agreed that they had heard a shot. "Am I arguing?" Shannon yelled. "I heard it, too." His left hand made an almost imperceptible sign to Frances. "I was walking along the road here, and right after that Miss MacLeish came tearing out and got in her car. When I stopped her to see what it was all about she fainted."

Frances accepted her cue. "The bullet came through my window and smashed a mirror." She shivered, probably with the cold, though with the exception of Shan-

non her audience could not know that.

Everybody immediately forgot all about Carmen MacLeish. "The devil you say! You mean they were shooting at you? Who was it?" There were a hundred more questions just as inane. Frances announced with a trace of asperity that she didn't know who had done it, but that if she ever found out she would let them all know. Presently Shannon caught her eye and she came over. "You know what to do," he said from the corner of his mouth. "She hasn't got the gun. Look for it. She came out of the women's locker room right afterward and was on her way, only I caught her."

"And you?"

"I'm sticking with the lady," he said. He saw that Miss Carmen MacLeish had been almost completely revived. He thrust the impromptu first-aid ladies aside. "Thanks, folks, I'll take it from here." He banged the car door closed, went around and climbed in under the wheel. "You might let the chief of police know about that shot." He drove hurriedly away.

FOR a time neither of them spoke, and there was no sound but the roar of the motor and the wind rushing past. From the tail of his eye Shannon could see her profile, beautiful even in its set hardness. He was conscious of her hands clenched tightly in her lap, and he thought that no matter what the cause she must be laboring under a terrific strain. Presently they debouched into the main highway and began the swift diagonal ascent of the road to the Resurrection. She drew an unsteady breath. "That was silly of me, wasn't it?"

"What?"

"Fainting like that."

"Oh."

She moved a little farther away from him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," he said shortly. "What happened up at the mine?"

"They were opening up an abandoned drift. Giles went down." She shivered. "Part of the shoring gave way and the roof came down on them—or behind them."

He stared straight ahead. "They notify you at the club?"

"No." It seemed to him that her breathing was a little more uneven now. "They hadn't meant to notify me at all until—until after they'd found out." She turned her green eyes full on him then. "There's something wrong, Shannon. Something's between us that wasn't there—this afternoon." She considered that. "Is it her? Does she mean so very much to you?"

He was startled. "Who?"

"Miss McGowan."

It occurred to him that here was still another motive for the most recent attempt on his life. Was it possible that the lady beside him was jealous? He decided that he was being slightly egotistical. "Hardly," he said. They roared up to the crest of the hill.

In and around the shaft house there was a constantly shifting but curiously silent throng. Floodlights illumined their faces, bearded faces, dirty faces, but all alike in one respect. There was a tense expectancy about them, and a kind of sullen anger.

The cage was down. A man with a portable telephone stood beside the shaft gates, a man with a holstered gun strapped to his thigh. There were two or three other men with guns, though they were very careful to seem unconscious of them.

Carmen MacLeish's voice was carefully repressed. "Hello, Kim. Hello, Otto." She spoke to half a dozen other men. "May I get through, please?"

The mob parted readily enough. Shannon and the girl went through and crossed to the man by the shaft gates. He licked his lips. "They're trying to drive a pipe through, Miss MacLeish. We're working as fast as we can."

"I'm sure you are, Pete."

In that moment Shannon admired her as he had admired no other woman. She can take it, he thought. Her old man is down there, somewhere, and she knows that he may never come up, and she can stand there discussing it like a soldier. It occurred to him that his theory about her earlier agitation was all shot to hell, but oddly enough he was not as disappointed as he should have been. He discovered that he was hanging on word from that telephone as avidly as any of the others.

The cage came up. In it were two men. "More pipe," one of them said laconically. Sweat runned the powdering of ore dust

on his face. For just a moment his blood-shot eyes rested on Carmen MacLeish. After that, all during the loading of pipe sections, he did not look at her again.

Her hand trembled on Shannon's arm. "I'm going down."

"All right," Shannon said. "I'll go with you."

NO ONE attempted to stop them as they got into the cage. They hugged the iron grille which walled it on two sides. There was an ore car on bolted-down tracks and still room enough for a hundred men. It was the biggest elevator Shannon had ever been on. And the descent, when it finally began, was the swiftest he had ever experienced, a kaleidoscopic plunge through alternate darkness and light. Landing stages flashed past his eyes, giant rock-walled rooms. Shannon clung tightly to Carmen MacLeish's hand. It was as cold as ice.

And then, when he thought that he could hold his breath no longer, the downward plunge ended. Shannon gagged a little with the suddenness of it. Through a kind of fog he was conscious of gates opening, and men and noise and swift purposeful movement. Carmen MacLeish urged him toward an electric-powered train of ore cars and obediently he climbed aboard. Pipe clanged and echoed as it was loaded, a bell set up a terrific clamor; then began a horizontal race as breath-taking at the vertical descent. So close to the ground, with roof and walls crowding in upon you, the speed was probably exaggerated, but Shannon could have sworn the tunnel was coming toward him at eighty miles an hour. He envisioned himself as a projectile in the bore of a giant gun. He looked at Carmen MacLeish. Dim, wide-spaced yellow lights alternately dyed her skin saffron and left it in shadow. She seemed quite unimpressed with the speed. Drifts opened out on either side and were gone, like rungs on a ladder, and there was a sound as of angry surf in a cave. Surprisingly the air was good.

The train slowed, the click of wheels over rail joints became clearly audible and they halted, though the tunnel still stretched away before them. In a lateral drift to the right, giant floodlamps illumined a scene like something out of Dante.

Perhaps half a hundred men labored there, labored and cursed and sweated, and their grotesque shadows leapt and writhed on the walls and the roof and against the seemingly imponderable mountain of rock and rubble and twisted timbers which mocked their puny efforts. For these men were not relying on the pipe alone, that tiny thread of iron crawling inch by inch into the mass. If successful it could bring air and perhaps a message of hope to the entombed men. It could not mend broken bodies. So the mountain must be moved, and they were moving it, though ever so slowly, with bars and picks and shovels, with air hammers and their bare hands. The racket of half a dozen pavement breakers was deafening. A man with a headset clamped to his ears bent down and affixed an instrument like a microphone to the new section of pipe being coupled on. Shannon watched with fascinated eyes as the big wooden mauls rose and fell, rose and fell, incessantly, driving the iron of life into the stubborn bosom of death.

Shannon put his mouth down close to the girl's ear. "What keeps it from buckling?" he shouted. "The pipe, I mean." For a moment he had forgotten that she was not just an interested spectator like himself. A dull flush darkened his face as he remembered. "I'm sorry, hon."

She nodded. Presently she leaned against him, as though she might absorb some of his strength. "It does buckle—sometimes." Her green eyes lifted. "Then they pull it out and do it all over again."

He marveled at that. "The hell they do." The odd thought occurred to him that mining in general, and this blind probing in particular, must be a little like the detective business. You kept trying, that was all, and if you were lucky you hit, and if you weren't you didn't.

Three more sections of pipe had followed the first before the man with the headset raised an arm for silence. The racket of the air hammers ceased; all movement ceased, and all sound except for the hiss of compressed air in the hoses. The girl leaned more heavily on Shannon and he could feel the sudden trembling in her body. He put both arms around her, holding her tight. "They've got it," the man said. His voice sounded unnatural in the stillness. He lifted

his hand and someone put a pipe wrench into it. He began a measured tapping on the iron still exposed. Shannon was no expert on Morse, but even he got the question: "O.K.?"

Only the man with the headset could hear the answer. His lips spelled it out as he got it. "A-l-l b-u-t t-w-o. N-e-e-d a-i-r."

Carmen thrust Shannon from her. "Ask him"—she moistened parched lips—"ask him—" She could not go on, but the man understood. The wrench beat out a swift query: "MacLeish?"

And again his mouth relayed the answer. "MacLeish talking."

She turned then and looked at Shannon. "MacLeish is talking, Irish." She swayed toward him. "Is there—anything left in that bottle?"

XVII

IN AN apartment over a hardware store on Second Street Shannon found Maxie Mueller, business agent for the Amalgamated Mine Workers. The ferret-like little man stared at his caller with sleep-drugged eyes. It was four o'clock in the morning. "What's the big idea?" He was in the noisiest pajamas Shannon had ever seen. Behind him the cluttered room had the look of a poker flat after an all-night session.

"I just thought we ought to have a little talk," Shannon said. He put a flattened hand in the middle of the small man's chest and pushed. He went in and closed the door and twisted the key. Sombre eyes watched Mueller pick himself out of the wreckage of a taboret loaded with bottles, glasses and overflowing ash trays. "Where were you between midnight and one o'clock?"

"Here," Mueller said promptly. He licked his thin lips. "I can prove it." After a while he got around to asking the inevitable "Why?"

Shannon leaned his back comfortably against the door. There was a little color in his high cheekbones and his mouth was not pleasant. "Somebody took a shot at a friend of mine," he said. "I thought it might be you." He did not believe that the bullet had been aimed at Frances, but he thought it a good idea to go on pretending that he did. At least for a while.

Mueller was indignant. "Why the hell should I?"

"For the same reason you threw that dynamite," Shannon said. He took out his gun.

Mueller's shifty eyes darted around the room. His skin was the color of old parchment. "You—you must be crazy!"

"I am," Shannon nodded. "In about two minutes I'm going to start shooting, and I'm going to watch the slugs bounce you around on the floor till there aren't any more." His smile was that of an epicure savoring his favorite dish. "I'm going to like that, Maxie."

Desperately Mueller seized on the promised stay of execution. You can say an awful lot in two minutes. "Now look, copper, you got me all wrong. Why should I have thrown that sixty percent."

"So it was sixty percent," Shannon said. "The guy didn't tell me that."

"What guy?"

"The guy you got it from." Shannon said this with as much confidence as though he and the guy were buddies. He figured he was on pretty firm ground now. So did Mueller. With a bleat of terror the small man bent far over and scuttled for the bedroom door. Shannon ran after him. Mueller actually had his hand on the knob when Shannon caught him by the scruff of the neck and hauled him kicking back into the room and hurled him into a chair.

Mueller watched the gun with the intent gaze of a hypnotized bird. "You—you didn't shoot!" He appeared to extract some small degree of hope from this fact. "I've got dough, copper. How—how's about just forgetting the whole thing?"

Shannon's smile was a trifle wolfish now. "How much dough?"

A cunning look came into the beady eyes. "Five grand?"

"For all my trouble?" Shannon was outraged. "Come again, Maxie."

Mueller shuddered. "Ten?"

Shannon considered that. Finally he said, "Cash?"

"Yes."

"Get it," Shannon said. He watched Mueller move a picture on the wall and with shaking hands dial the combination of a small safe. Mueller had to try three times before the door finally swung open.

Counting the money Shannon said, "This the union's dough or yours?"

"Mine."

Shannon put the money in his pocket. "You and Pilsudski must have a pretty nice thing here."

Mueller's thin lips curled. "Pilsudski's a fool."

"Sure he is." Shannon discovered an open desk in a corner of the room. "Just so you won't think I am too, you'd better sign a confession." He waved his gun at the desk.

Mueller began to shake all over again.

"Now look, copper—"

"The hell with you," Shannon said angrily. "You tried dynamite once. How do I know you won't try it again? How do I know you won't try to get this ten grand back?"

It was obvious that Max Mueller has been considering this very thing. He sighed. "Well—"

FINALLY he went over to the desk and picked up a pen. "What do I say?"

Shannon's face was ingenuous. "Just say, 'To Whom It May Concern,' and then tell 'em it was you that threw the dynamite." Almost absently he added, "Maybe you'd better put down the guy's name that sold it to you."

Mueller stared at him suspiciously. "You know that already."

"Well, sure, but suppose I get knocked off?" He shrugged. "Not that I don't trust you, pal." He watched Mueller's pen move reluctantly across the paper. "Tell 'em about why you did it, too. You know, about charging Pilsudski's hunkies three times the regular dues and keeping the gravy for yourself. About how you were scared that maybe the Head Office had sent me out to check up on you, and how you needed a little time to cover up."

The pen hovered in mid-sentence. "This is dynamite."

"You ought to recognize it," Shannon laughed.

The pen was still irresolute. "But I—"

"What are you afraid of?" Shannon demanded. "All I wanted to be sure of is that the next time something happens it isn't you." He scowled. "I've got enough troubles."

You could see Mueller figuring all the

angles. If he signed the confession Shannon had him, but then it looked as though Shannon had him anyway. With a kind of fatalism he finished the statement and signed it. Shannon picked it up and admired it. He waved it in the air to dry the ink. He put it in his pocket. The smile went away from his mouth and he began to shake. "Now get dressed."

A lesser intelligence than Maxie Mueller's could have sensed something radically wrong in that. He came to his feet. "What for?" The sudden stark fear on his face was an ugly thing to see.

"We're going over to Headquarters," Shannon said.

"But you—you said—"

"I said that the next time something happened I wanted to be sure it wasn't you." By a tremendous effort of will Shannon stilled the trembling in his legs. He had never before been this close to deliberate murder. "With you in jail I'll be sure."

Sweat stood out on Mueller's face like the excrescence on a moldy rock "I paid you!"

"No" Shannon shook his head. "The ten grand is the difference between an extortion and attempted murder rap and"—he gestured with the gun—"and what I'd really like to do."

Mueller's narrow shoulders acknowledged defeat. "All right." And then, swift as light, he yanked open the drawer behind him and yellow fingers clawed at the gun which was there. With one blow Shannon knocked him cold. Flaming eyes looked down at his handiwork for a long, long time before he finally shook himself free of the desire to kick the guy's teeth in. He went to the phone. "Get me Police Headquarters, sister."

WHEN Whitey Loop came in some five minutes later he had Kronjager with him. His eyes slithered off Shannon's face and settled malevolently on the body of Maxie Mueller on the floor over by the desk. "I might have known it!"

"That's what I thought, too," Shannon said. Not too subtly his manner implied that the chief of police had probably known it all along. "But since you didn't I thought I'd give you a little help." He shrugged, and though his next words were

meant as a jab at Kronjager he did not look at the beer-bellied man. "You told me you didn't care what I did, so long as I was working for you."

Kronjager's face became suffused. He was remembering that he had been asked to leave the office during part of that last interview between Shannon and Loop. His confusion took the form of anger. "This guy is taking you for a sucker, Whitey. I'm warning you, like I did before, he's got more curves than a pretzel."

Shannon laughed. "But the curves on a pretzel always end up in the same place, Lew." He took the thick sheaf of currency out of his pocket and divided it evenly into two piles. One pile he pushed toward Whitey Loop. "Five grand," he said. "Half. I think that's about right."

Something that could have been admiration showed briefly in Loop's handsome cat eyes. "You figure all the angles, don't you, Shannon?"

Shannon made a bitter mouth. A thumb indicated the slowly awakening Maxie Mueller. "He'd have told you about it, wouldn't he?"

"And he'll tell everybody else!" Kronjager yelled.

"But nobody'll believe it," Shannon said. He took out the confession and smoothed it flat on the table. "Not after this." He managed to look as crooked as he was pretending to be. "Nobody in the world ever heard of a cop taking a bribe and then pinching the guy who gave it to him."

Loop was amused. "I'm just beginning to appreciate you, Irish." He looked at Kronjager. "You could take some lessons, Lew."

"I don't want any part of it," Kronjager said. His eyes were bloodshot. "And if you're smart you won't want any part of it either."

Mueller came to life. "I want a lawyer!" "You'll get a lawyer," Loop said. He snapped his fingers. "Put the cuffs on him, Lew." Kronjager lumbered over, and when Mueller attempted to resist the cuffs he smacked him in the mouth. Mueller began to whimper. Shannon had a hell of a time not feeling sorry for the guy. He remembered the dynamite and it was a little easier. Loop creased the confession between slender, well-kept fingers. "How'd you work it, Irish?"

Shannon told him. "He came sucking around, wanting to know what Pilsudski and I had talked about." He stared very hard at Kronjager. "It was he told you Pilsudski had been in my room."

Kronjager flushed. Shannon accepted that as an admission. "He overheard the last part of what Pilsudski said, but he thought there might have been more. When he tackled me and I threw him out on his ear he figured I was a sure bet to be investigating him, so he tried to cancel me out." He was beginning to be angry all over again. "When that didn't work he passed some information on to Kronjager, hoping you guys might do what he had failed to do."

"Knock you off?" Loop suggested.

"Yes."

Loop laughed. "But you let it ride?"

"I didn't have any motive, except that I'd handled him a little bit," Shannon said. "When I really got to thinking about him I checked with some of the men and found another one." He put smoldering eyes on the chief of police. "If I were you I wouldn't let this get around for a while. After what happened tonight up at the Resurrection it's only going to take a little bit to touch the men off."

Kronjager leered. "The hell with that. With what we've got and what we can make this chiseler tell us we can put the skids under Pilsudski."

"Shut up, Lew." Loop scarcely raised his voice, but there was no doubt that he was boss. He looked at Shannon. "There's one other little matter we ought to get straightened out. Somebody took a shot at Miss McGowan tonight. He remembered that it was almost morning. 'Last night, rather. Any ideas about that?'"

"No."

"You were there."

"I was on my way there," Shannon corrected him. He took out his gun. "If you think it was me you can compare that with the slug."

Loop did not offer to take the gun. "I don't think it was you. On the other hand"—he stared thoughtfully at the cursing Mueller—"you might know who it was."

Shannon's ribald laughter echoed in the room. "Go ahead and pin that on him, too, if you want to." He looked at Kronjager. "Personally, I think it was Lew, here."

Kronjager began to shake. "Let me take this guy, Whitey."

"No." Loop's cat eyes rested speculatively on Shannon's face. "Why should he?"

"Maybe he's queer," Shannon suggested. "Maybe he was jealous and afraid you were getting too interested in the lady." He watched Kronjager's face turn the color of raw liver. "Better see about your blood pressure, Lew. You're liable to die a natural death."

XVIII

A LIGHT still burned in the Western Union office, and after some little thought Shannon went in and filed a wire to a man named O'Hara in San Francisco. It was a rather long telegram. Besides outlining the case against Max Mueller it described Las Cruces as a powder keg which was liable to be touched off at any moment, causing no end of trouble for the Amalgamated Mine Workers. It suggested that John J. Shannon, upon the proper authorization from Headquarters, would be glad to keep things under control until the arrival of Max Mueller's successor. It gave references, notably the Los Angeles police department.

The clerk read the wire but did not appear to think there was anything funny about it. He charged Shannon three dollars and eighty-five cents for sending it. Shannon saw a phone booth and called the smelter, inquiring for Jan Pilsudski. It appeared that Pilsudski worked the night shift, and therefore should be home in bed. Shannon got the address and went over there. It was a rooming house over a combination pool hall and restaurant. He thought this was a hell of a place for the mayor of Las Cruces to live.

He went up narrow, dimly lighted stairs. In an alcove on the first landing there was a kind of office, deserted now. Stickers pasted below pigeon-holes gave the names of the tenants. Pilsudski was in Room 27. Shannon went down there. As he lifted his hand to knock he became conscious of movement down at the far end of the corridor. A man was going away, swiftly, but very, very quietly. Indeed Shannon caught but a brief flash of tweed-clad legs beneath a flapping overcoat, and of a head crowned

with dead, white hair before the back stairs swallowed the oddly retiring and furtive person of Mr. George St. Cyr. He considered going after his attorney and asking him what the hell, but decided against it. He knocked on the door.

It opened almost instantly, as though Pilsudski had been expecting someone, or had just parted from someone. He seemed a little surprised at seeing Shannon standing there. "Hoh, iss you!"

Shannon accepted the fact that he had not been thrown out as an invitation to come on. He saw a sagging iron bed and a dresser from which the paint was scaling, a couple of chairs and a spindly golden-oak table. A drop cord depended from the ceiling, ending in a yellow incandescent which did little toward making the room exactly glamorous, but it was clean. He closed the door, conscious that Pilsudski's eyes had never left him. "They arrested Max Mueller about an hour ago."

Pilsudski stood perfectly still. He stood that way for so long that Shannon was afraid he had gone to sleep. Finally the big man said, "Who?"

Shannon sat in a chair and took off his hat. "Loop and Kronjager." He put a hand in his topcoat pocket, the one with his gun in it. "I fingered the guy for them."

Pilsudski shook himself. The effect was that of a St. Bernard coming out of the water. "Why you do that?"

"Because he's the one that threw that dynamite in my window," Shannon said. Carefully, without hurry, he outlined the means by which he had isolated Mueller as a suspect. "Mueller is bound to talk," he said presently. "I thought you'd like to know."

Pilsudski's eyes opened very wide. "What I care?"

Shannon stretched his legs out in front of him. He looked sleepily, and he was sleepily, but he was also being very, very watchful. "You've been importing men, guys that probably never saw a copper mine before, and Max Mueller has been unionizing them for you—at a price." He sighed. "That's going to look kind of bad, pal." His voice took on a certain inexorable quality. "There was another accident last night. Up at the Resurrection. One of the two men that died belonged

to you. His beneficiary is the Polish Relief Society. I don't think there is any Polish Relief Society."

AN ALMOST beatific expression came into the giant's blue eyes. "Iss me," he said proudly. "Polish Relief is Pilsudski." He was clothed in a kind of regal dignity. "Iss legal."

Shannon was startled. "Who told you that—St. Cyr?"

"Unh-hunh." He admired St. Cyr. "Iss very smart, that wan."

"Like hell he is," Shannon said. "Maybe it's legal and maybe it isn't, but neither one of you is very smart." For a moment he was lost in thought, and then curiosity overcame him. "How much have you got in the kitty?" He corrected that last to "treasury."

"Not wan dam cent in it now," Pilsudski said, as though that, too, was a matter for pride. "Iss go to help make Poland to live again." He drew himself erect. "You like all the others, yes? You think is fonny, those hunkies, yes?" He pointed a finger the size of a frankfurter. "Those hunkies know they gonna die maybe, but they feel good, 'cause it helps Poland—just like they was soldiers."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Shannon said. He thought that they were even better than soldiers. About ten thousand dollars better, because that was what it cost the mine and smelter operators every time one of them died. It occurred to him that Wolfgang Rygaard, in backing Pilsudski for mayor, had nursed a viper to his bosom; a patriot maybe, but from the operators' standpoint a viper nonetheless. He pretended great admiration for the scheme. "How do you work it?"

Pilsudski scratched an itch between his shoulder blades. "Iss offices in Phoenix," he said. "Mens join society, sign papers." He waved. "W'en they die, Pilsudski gets ten t'ousand dollars."

"And you're working in a smelter!"

"Iss for Poland," Pilsudski said simply. Shannon stood up. "Now I'll tell you why you're not smart, pal." He scowled. "You and that lousy attorney of mine." He had to tilt his head back a little to look into the big man's eyes. "Did it ever occur to you that a good half of these accidents might not be accidents at all?"

Pilsudski took even that in his stride. "Iss not my business." It appeared that his only trouble had been that so many of the men had been Irish, Welsh and what not, and not in the least interested in the eventual rebuilding of that great country, Poland. It had seemed a simple thing to him to substitute patriotic Poles wherever possible. "Only iss union town," he said. He sighed heavily. "So I am needing those Max Mueller." It occurred to him that without the venial Mueller his scheme was in danger of falling apart. His big hands knotted suddenly into fists. "I think I am going be very mad on you," he said.

Shannon backed away from him. "Now wait a minute, I'm trying to do you a favor." In his pocket his strong brown fingers curled tightly about the butt of his gun. He hoped he was not going to have to use it. "No doubt your motives are very noble and all that, but unfortunately it isn't only your patriots that are getting themselves killed. How do you think all the others are going to feel? What's going to stop the operators from accusing you of *causing* the accidents?" For the first time his real purpose behind this visit came out in the form of a casual suggestion: "If I were you, Jan, I'd hole up somewhere until after this blows over."

Pilsudski took a slow step toward him. Though his blue eyes were still wide and naive, his voice had become a low growl. "You are not going tell nobody," he said. His purpose was clear. The curl of his fingers implied unpleasant things being done to somebody's throat. Shannon needed only one guess as to whose throat. "You're forgetting Max Mueller," he said. He saw that the name had not registered. Pilsudski was like a man in a trance. He had room for but one idea at a time. Shannon kept backing away, step by step, until he felt the bed behind his knees and knew that he could go no farther.

Then Pilsudski had him, bending him back over the bed, and he could not say anything any more. He couldn't even breathe. He pulled the trigger, knew that the hammer had fallen, but beyond that nothing happened. There was no shot. He began to struggle then, childishly, like a drowning man going down for the last time. And like a drowning man's his

vision was suddenly quite clear and he saw George St. Cyr come into the room and pick up a chair. After that he lost count for a little while.

XIX

THAT makes us even," St. Cyr said. Crane-like, he bent to peer at the recumbent Pilsudski. He was not talking to Pilsudski. Even if he had been, Pilsudski couldn't have heard him.

Shannon sat on the bed and massaged his throat with tender fingers. "What made you come back?"

"I don't know," St. Cyr said. "I just thought I'd better." He picked up the chair with which he had hit Pilsudski, saw that it was no longer going to be very serviceable as a chair and finally propped it in a corner, a trap for the unwary sitter. He took a flask out of his hip pocket and held it to the light, measuring its contents. Apparently there was enough, for he said, "Drink?"

"You're damned right," Shannon said. He seized the flask in both hands and tilted it to his lips. Liquor scorched a pair of tonsils that appeared to have been sandpapered raw. He coughed. "Well, thanks." He was oddly embarrassed. He hated to think of what would have happened if St. Cyr had not come back.

"Quite all right," St. Cyr said politely. He emptied the flask. With a kind of clinical interest he again examined his victim. Pilsudski was just beginning to stir. "Marvelous physique, what?"

"But dumb," Shannon said. It occurred to him that he himself had not been exactly smart. "Look who's talking." He tried to extricate the gun from his pocket. A wrinkle in the lining had got caught between the hammer and the firing pin. He cursed it.

St. Cyr regarded him in some amazement. "You would have shot him?"

Shannon felt of his throat. "Wouldn't you?" After a while he said, "I didn't want to. I need him in my business." He yanked a sheet off the bed and began methodically tearing it into strips. When presently he got up off his knees, Pilsudski bore a rather striking resemblance to a mummy. "That oughto hold you." Pilsudski answered nothing to this. His eyes

were wide open and no doubt he wanted to, but a gag is a gag. Shannon looked at St. Cyr. "As long as you're here you can help me carry him."

"Where?"

"How do I know?" Shannon demanded. "Some place we can keep him on ice for a day or two." He scowled. "You think the cops aren't going to tie him up with Mueller?"

St. Cyr denied thinking anything of the kind. "I take it you're not being just a good samaritan?"

"I told you, didn't I? I need him in my business."

St. Cyr teetered on his heels. "And that is?"

Shannon looked at him. "You wouldn't understand this. You're British. But just for the hell of it I'm going to tell you." His eyes got a sultry look. "I sent a friend of mine up here to do a job. He got pushed around. So I came up and people began pushing me around, too." He found his hat and put it on. "The Shannons hate to be pushed, that's all."

"I see." St. Cyr waved a bony hand at the giant mummy on the floor. "Pilsudski?"

"He's a lever," Shannon said shortly. He drew a deep breath. "I hope."

"I've a car downstairs," St. Cyr said. Presently it developed that he knew of a worked-out silver claim called the Dos Pesos, too. After some little discussion they decided that the Dos Pesos was just the place for a guy named Pilsudski.

SHANNON went into the lobby. The clerk who looked as though he might read the *Esquire* ads hailed him. "There was a phone call for you, Mr. Shannon."

Shannon paused. "They leave their name?"

"No, sir." The clerk yawned. "It was a woman."

Shannon decided he would try Fran McGowan, just on the off chance that she might have found the gun she was supposed to look for.

Fran's voice came to him, distant but no less indignant because of that. "What do you want?" she demanded crossly.

He wondered if the attendant out at the club might be listening in. "Then you didn't find it?"

"No."

He scowled at the blank panel in front of him. "Is that all you can say?"

"Yes."

"Well, did anybody else find it?"

"No."

"I wish you were always that monosyllabic," he said. He banged the receiver up, good and loud, hoping it would give her an earache. He dropped another nickel and dialed Wynn Thorelsen's number. Here he got no answer at all. He could hear her phone ringing and he waited a long time before he finally concluded she must be out. He frowned a little, wondering why she should be out at this time of night. It occurred to him quite suddenly that the call might have come from Rose Machado. He was on the point of looking up her number when he decided that if it had been she who called he couldn't do business with her over the telephone. He let the book drop and went out and told the clerk he would be back in half an hour.

When he came opposite the stairs leading up to the covered balcony he went up them swiftly. It was not until he reached the landing that he paused and leaned there against the rail, breathing softly. Below him was a tiny walled patio, and the faint scent of dew-laden grass came up to him. On his right, four doors opened onto the balcony. He remembered that Rose Machado's apartment had had French doors. There was only one pair of these and he went toward them, balanced on the balls of his feet and very quietly. He saw that behind drawn drapes there was faint light. With his fingernails he tapped gently on the glass.

There was no answer. After a moment he tried it again and it seemed to him that there was furtive movement in the room. A tiny gust of wind came up the stairs and rattled the windows, and it was then that he discovered the catch was broken. He went in, very quickly, parting the closed drapes and letting them fall behind him. Rose Machado, still in the scarlet dress of last night, lay on the white chaise. Where the gown swelled over her breasts it was stained a darker red, and there were two small holes in the center of the stain, very close together. Her eyes were wide open.

Shannon's first impulse was to run. There was nothing but danger for him here, now. Then he realized that this was not a cold murder, cold in the sense that Bill Thorelsen's was. It was hot, so hot that it was burning up, and the heat from it might easily warm the trail back to that other one. Swift anger attacked him, anger at himself for predicting, but not actually foreseeing this; anger at the woman for being clumsy. He stood there looking down at her for a moment, and the hard light went out of his eyes and he was no longer angry. "I'm sorry, Rose," he said through stiff lips. "I kind of liked the way you sang."

XX

AT FIVE minutes past noon Shannon accepted the yellow envelope thrust at him by the Mex bell-hop in the vivid purple suit, closed the door and opened the wire. It was from the man in San Francisco named O'Hara:

John J. Shannon, Las Cruces, Ariz.

Empower you to act for us until arrival new representative. Investigate Mueller activities but keep lid on. Advise if need help.

Amalgamated Mine Workers, Pacific Area,

Sean O'Hara, Chairman.

Down in the left-hand corner they had repeated "Empower." Shannon felt that two "empowers" gave him enough authority to do almost anything he wanted to, at least temporarily, with about thirty thousand men.

It was not until he had finished showering and was almost dressed that the next interruption came. This time it was the Law. You knew it was the Law by the belligerence of the knock. Shannon was grateful that he had been allowed as much as six hours' sleep. He smoothed the furrows of worry from his face and gave a very fair imitation of an innocent, care-free "Come in!"

Loop and Kronjager came in. Kronjager's blue serge suit looked as though he had slept in it. His face looked as though he had not slept at all. The tiny ruptured

veins in his nose and cheeks were a kind of bilous magenta and he had a hard time keeping the triumph out of his eyes. "Did we wake you up, Shannon?"

Shannon said no, he'd been up a long time. He went on knotting his tie. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Loop was whistling a little tune between his teeth. He stopped that to inquire if Shannon had ever heard of a lady named Rose Machado. "Lives over on the Avenida Juan Batista."

That was meant to be a trap. He watched Shannon's face, expecting it to show that Shannon knew she didn't live there any more. Shannon nodded. "Sure. I met her last night."

"What time last night?"

Shannon decided to be a little angry. "Why not ask the lady?"

"I'm asking you."

"And I'm telling you to go roll a hoop," Shannon said. He appeared to realize that he was being accused of something. "Look, what's this all about, anyway?"

Kronjager thrust out an unshaven chin. "What'd you go over there for in the first place?"

Shannon leered. "What do people usually go over there for?"

"Don't give me that," Kronjager said. He took out his gun, hefting it suggestively. "You went over to talk to her about Thorelsen."

"Did I?"

"Yes."

"And then you killed her," Loop said.

Shannon's face registered surprise, then shock, then outraged innocence. He hoped he wasn't overdoing it. You're a liar!" He allowed suspicion to come into his eyes, suspicion that they were ribbing him. "You're not kidding me—she's really dead?"

Kronjager spat. "You never saw one any deader."

Shannon just couldn't seem to believe it. "And only last night I heard her sing!" He looked at Loop. "Ever hear her, Whitey?" He was overcome. "Marvelous, that's what she was. Why, that gal ought to have been—"

"Save it," Loop advised him crisply. "We'll put it on her headstone." For the first time anger showed in his eyes, and Shannon didn't know whether to be more

afraid of him this way or when he was purring. "Now maybe you'll answer my question."

SHANNON looked around for a cigarette, finally found one, lit it and filled his lungs. "You know the answer to that, Whitey. That's what brought you around to see me. I dropped in there about midnight, maybe a little after, left my hat and coat with the maid, listened to Rose sing, went upstairs with her for a little while—"

Loop's eye flamed a warning. "I know. Then you came down and got your hat and coat and went around the corner." He made a fist of his right hand, looked very hard at Shannon's mouth. "I'm not talking about that time. I'm talking about the second trip."

"There wasn't any second trip," Shannon said. He moved a little, putting Loop between himself and Kronjager. He thought maybe he could take one at a time, but certainly not both. "I can account for almost every minute after the first and only visit." He watched Kronjager move to compensate his own change of position. "When did it happen?"

Loop relaxed a trifle. "Roughly at four o'clock this morning."

Shannon began to laugh. "If you'll think back you'll find that at four this morning I was very busy with Max Mueller and you and Lew, here."

"I said 'roughly.'"

"All right, before that I was with Giles MacLeish, after they got him out of that cave-in. Carmen brought me into town." "And where'd you go after you left us?"

"To see my attorney." He spread his hands. "This whole thing is kind of silly, isn't it? I mean, if I did go to see her about Thorelsen, and she was lying, she wouldn't be any good to me dead."

Loop appeared to be convinced. "That's right." He turned to Kronjager. "Remember that, Lew. Mr. Shannon did not kill the Machado woman. He's proved he didn't." The smile he gave Shannon was the kind the wolf gave Little Red Riding Hood. "That's in case you wanted to change your story later."

Little needles of apprehension did things to Shannon's stomach. "Why should I want to change it?"

Kronjager's belly shook with obscene mirth. "To maybe keep your client from hanging, that's why." He guffawed.

Shannon licked his lips. "Mrs. Thorelsen?"

"We've got her," Loop nodded. He snapped his fingers. "Just like that." At the door he turned. "And if you're thinking it's a frame you can get her an alibi and make a liar out of Ballistics. The slugs came out of her gun."

XXI

PILSUDSKI'S teeth made unpleasant grinding noises. He was trying to induce a little saliva from what moisture was left in his system after six or seven hours of being gagged.

Hunkered down beside him on the rocky floor of the Dos Pesos, Shannon admired the label on a quart bottle of Ten High. He smacked his lips. "You could have some of this if you'd be nice."

A bar of sunlight came in the half-open door of the tunnel and touched Pilsudski's head with gold. Where there was no covering his body looked blue. It was very cold in the tunnel. "I've brought you some clothes too," Shannon said. He added other inducements. "And some food and blankets." He looked around. "You could be quite comfortable here."

Pilsudski growled. "Whoosa knock me out?"

"A pixie," Shannon said. "Trouble with you, Jan, you're impulsive. I'm doing you a favor—I was trying to do you one last night—and you're too dumb to realize it." He sighed. "Yours was a noble racket, but it's all over now. It would have been over even if you'd killed me."

Pilsudski was staring very hard at the bottle. "Those Mueller are talking?"

"Sure. Why wouldn't he?"

Pilsudski looked at him curiously. "How you know I won't beat your brains out when you untie me?"

Shannon saw no reason to mention the gun in his pocket, and the fact that he had made sure the hammer would never get caught in the lining again. "I trust you," he said.

Pilsudski was touched. His eyes were

childlike in their wonder. "What you wanting I should do?"

"Just stay here," Shannon said. "Keep out of sight for a day or two and maybe I'll be able to fix things for you." He did not say that maybe he would be able to fix things for himself, too. He had not yet figured out exactly how he would use Pilsudski. "Okay?"

"Hokay," Pilsudski said.

Shannon got out a knife and went to work on the twisted sheets. When he was through with that he left Pilsudski to massage the circulation back into his own arms and legs and began carrying in the stuff from the rented car. "Anybody comes snooping around, hold 'em for me." He remembered St. Cyr. "All but our mutual counsel." He stared at the golden-haired giant with sudden suspicion. "I don't suppose it was you that's been arranging these accidents?"

Pilsudski was standing erect now. He flexed his great arms. "Like those bus, maybe?" He seized the Ten High bottle and almost drained it. "You are forgetting Pilsudski is on those bus?"

Shannon had forgotten it. What with one thing and another he had almost forgotten that he, too, had been on the bus. "All right, then, all you've got to do is stay put till I come for you." He went out and got in the car and tooted it back to the highway.

He wondered how St. Cyr was making out with Wynn Thorelsen. He himself had not gone to see her, which probably was why he had not been tailed out to the Dos Pesos. Floyd Loop would have expected him to see her the very first thing. Oddly, though, it was neither Pilsudski's comfort nor the desire to out-think Loop which had kept him from going. It was the knowledge that he himself had tried to phone her and there had been no answer. He decided that killing Rose Machado was just the kind of thing a hysterical woman would do.

Coming into town he saw George St. Cyr standing on the steps of City Hall. As usual he was bareheaded, though this time he had a haircut and his white hair was brushed neatly back. His tweeds looked as though they might have been pressed. He looked pretty good. Shannon

parked and waited for him to cross the street. "You see her?"

"Yes, I saw her." St. Cyr's manner indicated that he had not been too pleased with what he saw.

"Well, did she do it or didn't she?"

"I'm afraid she did," St. Cyr said. He avoided Shannon's eyes. "The gun is hers. In fact it was her husband's before her. That's how the police were able to check so readily." He studied the palm of his left hand. "Sort of poetic justice, what? The gun that killed her husband killed the woman responsible."

Shannon made an impatient gesture. "Say it was stolen."

"Of course," St. Cyr said.

"She say where she'd been all night?"

"Driving." St. Cyr had a rather expressive mouth. "Just driving around, you know. She saw no one. No one saw her." With the ball of his thumb he rubbed a speck of dirt off the car door. "She had dined with Giles MacLeish, and when she heard about the accident up at the Resurrection she was upset." His brown spaniel eyes looked at Shannon.

"I don't give a damn," Shannon said angrily. "We've got to get her out of it."

"Well, maybe I'll think of something," St. Cyr said. He regarded Shannon intently. "Often I find that liquor stimulates my imagination. Would you entertain a motion to get stiff?"

"No!"

"Then I'll entertain it all by myself."

"You will like hell," Shannon said. He got out of the car. "We're going over to see the editor of the *Clarion*."

THE editor was a smallish, completely bald man with horn-rimmed glasses. St. Cyr performed the introductions. The editor's name was Salter and it appeared that he was also the publisher. Shannon said, "I dropped in to pay you for that ad you've been running."

Salter was regretful. "No answers, Mr. Shannon?"

"Not one."

"That's an odd name," Salter said. He savored it, along with a swallow of Ten High. "Johann Smith—very funny."

"What's funny about it?"

Salter absently blue-penciled a proof.

"I don't know, I just seem to recall something about it, that's all."

Shannon became impatient. "How would you like to sell this sheet?"

"Are you actually making me an offer?" "Maybe."

Salter tried to keep the eager look out of his eyes. "I've got about eighteen thousand invested in equipment. Besides—"

"Including the sidewalk outside?" Shannon wanted to know.

"Well, call it ten grand—in cash."

"I'll give you five." Shannon took his half of the Mueller steal out of his pocket. It made a nice showing. The bills were practically new, and they rustled when he scattered them on the counter. Avarice tinted Salter's glasses a faint green. "There's a condition, too," Shannon said.

Salter's hands shook. "What?"

"You'd have to run the sheet for a while. Say two or three days."

St. Cyr was doing his best not to look amazed. You felt that Shannon was a new experience to him, but that he would always be carefully polite, no matter what happened. He said, "As your attorney I ought to tell you that the *Clarion* isn't exactly a gold mine." He looked at the *Clarion's* owner. "No offense, Salter."

"Salter was slightly crestfallen. Well—"

Shannon made a magnificent gesture. He could afford to be magnificent with somebody else's money. "The offer still stands." He lit a cigarette. "Matter of fact, the reason this isn't a gold mine is that Salter doesn't know his politics. He avoids them entirely."

This time Salter's battle was with something else besides avarice. "I don't want to get mixed up in anything."

"That's why I'm offering to take over," Shannon said. "Otherwise I'd have bought a front page and called it a day." He took out the O'Hara telegram and laid it on the counter. St. Cyr read it and shuddered.

SALTER read more slowly. You could see his news instinct wrestling with caution. "I don't know what's behind this, but I'm afraid—" He stood up. "I'll sell you the paper. I won't run it."

Shannon became persuasive. "You won't have anything to worry about.

You'll just be an employee." He shrugged. "Tell you what. Build up the sale on the front page. Then if anybody gets tough they'll get tough with me."

Salter looked at him. "What are you trying to do?"

"I like this town," Shannon lied. "I'm going to become a solid citizen." With gestures he described the front page he had in mind. "Mueller's arrest, and the way he's plundered the men; the new ownership of the *Clarion*; the appointment of John J. Shannon, who will entertain a grievance committee at eight o'clock tonight."

Salter's eyes glistened. "Well—"

Shannon pressed his advantage. "Look, I've even got a friend who'll write the emotional parts for you. She's literary as hell."

St. Cyr was overcome. "Miss McGowan?"

"Certainly," Shannon said with great dignity. "Miss McGowan is public-spirited. Like me." He stared very hard at Mr. Salter. "Of course, if you don't want to do it I can go over and buy a special edition in Corona."

"Oh, I'll do it," Salter said. He yelled at the boys in the back room. "Hey, Jerry, Pete, Ortega, come on out and meet your new boss!" He began hurriedly gathering up the scattered currency. Jerry and Pete and Ortega came out and met their new boss. They were not impressed. Ortega, the linotype man, spat a brown stream at a non-existent cuspidor. "Does that mean we get paid?"

"Paid!" Shannon said. "Why, hell, you can have the lousy sheet when I get through with it!" He took St. Cyr's arm. "Come on, let's go over and get Mueller's keys."

St. Cyr's legal mind was at work. "Really, you know, we should draw up the necessary forms and go into escrow."

"Later," Shannon said. He and St. Cyr crossed the street and went into City Hall. The lobby had half a dozen cops in it this time. They looked uneasy, as though they might be expecting a riot call. The door to the chief's anteroom was open. Shannon and St. Cyr went in there. Floyd Loop himself was at Kronjager's desk. "What do you want?"

Shannon tossed him the telegram. "I'm

pinch-hitting for the Amalgamated Mine Workers. I want Mueller's office keys and anything else belonging to the union." He looked smug. "I'm also the new owner of the *Clarion*."

For just a moment it seemed that Loop was unable to breathe. Then, very carefully, he said, "Aren't you getting a little too big for your pants, Shannon?"

Shannon was hurt. "Am I cutting in on anything of yours?" He became indignant. "No, and I don't want to!" He took off his hat and threw it on the desk beside the telegram. "These were just a couple little rackets you'd overlooked and I thought I'd—" He looked at St. Cyr, said, "Excuse me, Counselor," and leaned over and put his mouth down close to Loop's ear. "Remember the five grand last night? There'll be more."

Loop stood up. "I don't like it, Shannon."

"Then you're a bigger fool than I think you are," Shannon said. Again he leaned close and whispered. "With the paper and the men in your pocket you can do almost anything you want to in this town." The implication was that it was Loop, not he, who would have these things in his pocket. "I think I'll even join the Rotary Club," he grinned.

Loop looked at St. Cyr. "What about him?"

"I'll take care of him," Shannon promised. Aloud he said, "Anything you want to ask the chief about Mrs. Thorelsen, Counselor?"

"I'd like to see she's made a little more comfortable," St. Cyr said.

Loop's eyes returned to Shannon. "What about her?"

"That's up to her lawyer," Shannon said. He was regretful and a little angry. "Naturally I want to do what I can for her, but if she's going to go off half-cocked—"

"You callous louse," Loop said. There was nothing but admiration in his voice.

XXII

IN LOCAL 197, Amalgamated Mine Workers, Sannon was afflicted with the inferiority complex common to all crusaders, the feeling that missionaries must have when trying to convince head-

hunters that it's better to play checkers. Out in the anteroom men sat on the hard benches, waiting to get a look at their new business agent, and Gus Vogel cleared his throat nervously. "I hope you know what you're doing, John J." His hat was balanced precisely on his small plump knees. He had not been able either to prove or disprove Mr. Wolfgang Rygaard's presence in Safford on the night that Bill Thorelsen had died.

Shannon remembered that he had promised to call Mamie, in Los Angeles. He did that, "Mamie?"

Mamie sounded morose. "I thought you might be dead again."

"You find anything?"

"No. At least not under his own name."

Shannon was discouraged. It had occurred to him that Mr Rygaard might have employed the stock market as a means of getting control of the Resurrection Copper Company. He said, "All right, pet, forget it," and hung up.

Vogel jerked a thumb at the door of the anteroom. "Who's all them guys?"

"Just guys," Shannon said. He got up and went to the door. "The paper told you all there is to know. Mueller's been robbing some of you and as soon as I find out how much there'll be refunds." Some of them went away. Some just continued to sit. Shannon closed the door and stood over Vogel. "I want you to go down to Phoenix, Dutch. Find the offices of the Polish Relief Society and get a line on where all that dough has been going and how it got there."

"Why don't you ask Pilsudski?"

"I'd rather do it this way," Shannon said. "You don't have to be subtle. Give 'em a flash at a badge and tell 'em you're working for the government. Tell 'em Pilsudski has skipped out." He thought a moment. "While you're down there you might check up on Carmen MacLeish, too."

"I thought Miss McGowan was gonna do that."

"Miss McGowan has to write copy for the *Clarion*," Shannon said.

"More than she already has?" Vogel looked with undisguised distaste at the first edition of the *Clarion* under its new management.

"That depends," Shannon said. He was

conscious of the reason for Vogel's worry. "She won't be in any danger now. I'm a big shot."

"You're a fool," Vogel said frankly, adding his customary apology, "If you don't mind my saying so, John J."

WOLFGANG RYGAARD and he was angry. He had a copy of the *Clarion* in his hand and he slapped it down on Shannon's—or Mueller's—desk so hard the inkwells jumped. "What are you trying to do—get me lynched?" Behind him, his two bodyguards effectively blocked the only exits. The one with buck teeth and the general air of Mortimer Snerd gave Shannon duck bumps. You could see he was a man with but one idea. The other one was a slender dark man who kept both hands in his topcoat pockets. You felt that this was not just to keep them warm.

Shannon took his feet off the desk. "How was that again?"

"You heard me," Rygaard said. He was not the shouting kind, but the effect on Shannon's stomach was the same. "You've linked Mueller with Pilsudski, but by inference with me. Pilsudski is known to be my man."

"Then the inference is not mine," Shannon pointed out. He scowled. "If you elect a mayor you're supposed to know what he's doing. At least that's the way it works where I come from."

Rygaard's eyes bored into him. "What have you done with him?"

"Who?"

"Pilsudski?"

"I haven't done anything with him," Shannon said. "Why should I?"

"That's what I don't know—yet." You gathered that this condition was not going to prevail long, not if Mr. Wolfgang Rygaard could help it. He looked from Shannon to his two men. "I don't think you would be missed if you happened to leave Las Cruces, Mr. Shannon."

Shannon leaned forward, put his elbows on the desk, his chin in cupped palms. "That's where you're wrong, Mr. Rygaard. If anything happened to me at this particular moment there are about twenty thousand guys would take it as a personal affront." He smiled. "I'm their champion. I'm the only champion they've got

for the time being." He sneered at Mortimer Snerd. "Don't get any ideas, punk. If I disappear, or get killed, the mine operators are the logical ones to suspect."

At a look from Rygaard the gorilla and the slender dark man went out into the hall. The door closed. Rygaard found one of his thin dappled cigars and lit it. Through the first cloud of aromatic smoke his cold gray eyes regarded Shannon with a kind of respect. "You're a curious combination, Mr. Shannon—a mixture of native intelligence and bull in the china shop." He examined the tip of his cigar. "I don't think you're the usual rabble-rouser, so I ask myself what it is that you hope to accomplish by all this."

Shannon's mouth drooped. "It's all very simple. A guy named Mueller, under the misapprehension that I was after him and his petty racket, threw some dynamite at me." He spread his hands in wide gesture. "So I got Mueller."

"And Pilsudski," Rygaard said.

"Pilsudski was a by-product."

"Like me?"

Shannon stood up violently. "Can I help it if it looks like Pilsudski framed these accidents, or you through him?" He pointed a finger. "That's what happens when you start playing politics. One thing ties up with another."

"I see," Rygaard said quietly. He seemed intent on the accumulating ash of his cigar. "Only Pilsudski could prove that I had no connection with, or knowledge of, this Polish Relief Society."

"Well?"

Rygaard exhaled gently. "Find him for me, Mr. Shannon."

Shannon considered that. "I might try," he said finally. His eyes were ingenuous. "As long as there isn't any talk of killing people—like Whitey Loop, for instance—I'm still a private eye and open to offers."

"The suggestion about Loop was a mistake," Rygaard conceded. "I've reconsidered." He took out a pigskin billfold and removed ten hundred-dollar bills. "Find Pilsudski for me and there will be more." He laid the currency on the desk.

"I'll see what I can do," Shannon said. He put the money in his pocket, carelessly, as though thousand-dollar retainers were an everyday occurrence. He went to the

windows and stood there looking down at the street for a moment. "There's one other thing I'll have to make as a condition. I want to be able to come up to the Consolidated and ask questions without getting slugged."

"Questions about Bill Thorelsen?"

"Yes."

Rygaard was still for so long that the silence became oppressive. "Why?"

Shannon turned then and put sombre eyes on his visitor. "Mrs. Thorelsen shot Rose Machado. If I can prove she had a reason for it, at least a woman's reason, I can maybe get her off with a year." Try as he would he could detect no sign that Wynn's arrest, and his own acceptance of her guilt, had the slightest effect on Rygaard. He decided the man could not possibly be in love, or if he was it was not the kind of love that Shannon understood. "You can see that. If the Machado woman was a party to Thorelsen's murder—if, in the first place, it was a murder—then Mrs. Thorelsen would get sympathy from any jury on earth."

A tiny nerve at the corner of Rygaard's mouth began to twitch.

HE tried to mask even that by poking at his close-clipped mustache. "I think I told you that I sympathized with Mrs. Thorelsen's views."

"And suggested that I knock off Whitey Loop."

Rygaard made an impatient gesture. "That was an entirely different matter."

"Was it?" Shannon's fingers busied themselves with lighting a cigarette. His eyes never left Rygaard's face. "I don't think there'd better be any more accidents for a while, pal."

Rygaard dropped his cigar in an ash tray. "If you're hinting that I had anything to do with that one last night—"

"I'm not hinting anything," Shannon said. "The Consolidated has had just as many as the Resurrection." He spat out a flake of tobacco. "I'm just suggesting that it would be nice if there weren't any more. I've got a very weak stomach."

"And the *Clarion*." The Consolidated's manager allowed a wry smile to touch his lips. "That's a bet I overlooked."

"It wouldn't be any good without the

union," Shannon said. He grinned. "Together they're almost unbeatable."

"I'll bear that in mind," Rygaard said. He became brisk. "Meantime, you're welcome up at the Consolidated."

"Thanks." He watched Mr. Wolfgang Rygaard depart. Then there was a knock on the anteroom door. "Come in."

This time he had two visitors at once. They were Whitey Loop and Mr. Alf Lundy, who was the deputy prosecutor. Gus Vogel claimed to have seen accepting a hatful of money from Kronjager. Mr. Lundy was a red-necked young man with a mole which he kept worrying between a thumb and index finger. The mole was not the only thing that was worried. "I don't think we've—ah—met before, Mr. Shannon."

Shannon admitted that. He made his voice carefully insulting when he added, "I recognize the type, though."

Mr. Lundy was terribly embarrassed. "There seems to be some sort of misunderstanding here. Mr. Dawes—" He paused and his eyebrows interrogated Shannon's face. "You've met Mr. Dawes?"

"Oh, quite," Shannon said. He had practically no trouble at all recalling his interview with Mr. Kenesaw Dawes, the Abe Lincoln of Corona County. "I sort of thought he'd shoot off his mouth, so I didn't depend on him too much."

Lundy nervously cleared his throat. "Well, about that money—" He looked to Whitney Loop for a little assistance, but got none. Loop seemed to be intent on the front pages of the *Clarion*. "What I mean to say," Lundy continued, "is that I'm local chairman of the Police and Fire Department Benefit fund."

Shannon leered. "Since when? Since this morning?"

"Certainly not," Lundy said stiffly. Again his eyes sought succor of the police chief. "That is to say—"

Shannon laughed. "Forget it."

Lundy looked at him. "Does that mean—?"

"That I will? And Vogel?" Shannon sat on a corner of the desk. "Do you think we ought to forget it, Whitey?"

Loop folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "It might be a good idea."

"Then consider it forgotten," Shannon said. He took Loop's arm and led him

over to the windows, out of earshot of Lundy. "I got a thousand bucks out of Rygaard, to look for Pilsudski." He put a reluctant hand in his pocket. "If you're going to want half of everything—"

"Keep it," Loop said shortly. It was obvious that Lundy hadn't been the only reason for his call. "I thought Mueller's arrest was going to be soft-pedaled."

"Sure," Shannon said. He appeared to realize for the first time that Loop was displeased about the *Clarion's* front page. "You mean you didn't understand about that?" He frowned. "The soft pedal was just until we got a good grip on things."

"On what things?"

Shannon was surprised. "Look, you've got the two mine operators at each other's throats already. Why not play it to the limit?" He shrugged expressive shoulders. "Oh, I realize that you've been playing one against the other all along." He pointed a finger. "But just for peanuts. Just for the gambling and vice take."

Loop looked at him. "What have you got in mind?"

Shannon managed to look positively Machiavellian. "Owning the town, the mines"—he waved his hands in an all-inclusive gesture—"everything." He winked. "Take it from me, pal, there's more to this private war than meets the eye."

The irises of Loop's eyes dilated. His tone was sharp. "What?"

"I don't know that yet." Shannon became mildly reproving. "You've got to admit I've been a little handicapped until now."

"But you're not any more?"

"Not if you're with me," Shannon said.

They had both forgotten Mr. Alf Lundy hovering in the background. His cough reminded them that he was still there. "Perhaps I'd better be running along?"

"I'll go with you," Loop said. Once more he turned his curious golden eyes on Shannon. "But you did go to see Dawes?"

Shannon laughed. "That was before I realized the possibilities." This time his glance included Lundy. "Two arrests within twenty-four hours—arrests that are bound to result in convictions—ought to convince the most zealous prosecutor in the world." He winked broadly. "As for

that other, Vogel made a mistake." He watched them through the door with every evidence of good-will.

XXIII

FRANCES had a bunch of violets pinned to her furs, violets which must have come all the way from Phoenix. She was, as usual, platinum perfection. She sniffed appreciatively at the violets. "Giles MacLeish got them for me."

"Did I ask you?" Shannon yelled.

"He's helping me with a story," Miss McGowan said. Her eyes were like stars. "Isn't it wonderful the way people want to help poor struggling authors?"

Shannon's mouth was unpleasantly suggestive. "I'll bet you didn't struggle too much." He kicked a drawer shut. "You ought to be ashamed. He's old enough to be your father."

It was at this moment that Giles MacLeish himself came in. "Who is?"

"Rygaard," Shannon said maliciously. He interpreted the smile MacLeish gave Miss McGowan as slightly possessive. Shannon looked at him without love. "Well, go on and ask me, like Rygaard did, if I'm trying to get you lynched."

"All right," MacLeish said amiably. "Are you?"

Shannon stared at him suspiciously. "You seem to be feeling pretty good for a guy that was trapped in a mine tunnel only last night."

MacLeish examined his nails. "Maybe that's why I feel good," he said. "I got out."

"There were two guys who weren't so lucky," Shannon said.

MacLeish's heavy brows drew down in a frown. "You think I've forgotten that?"

Shannon moved aimlessly about the office. "You check up on that job last night? You question the men?"

"Yes." After a while the big man said, almost regretfully, "It looks like an accident, nothing more." He frowned. "There's a chance that it was an old charge, just lying there waiting for a careless pick to touch off. There's an equal chance that it was planted."

Shannon's eyes were suddenly bright and intent. "Say it was planted. Say that Rygaard instigated the planting." He

laughed without humor. "You admit you're responsible for a little sabotage yourself. How did you go about it?"

MacLeish looked at him from under beetling brows. "I'd have to know which side you're on before I told you that."

Shannon cursed him. "You asked me to investigate certain things for you, didn't you? How can I, if you won't play ball?" He scowled as MacLeish started to say something. "All right, I told you it might look like I'd thrown in with Rygaard; I told you you'd have to take the chance that I really had. You've still got to take that chance."

MacLeish shot a swift glance at Fran's profile. "How about it, Miss McGowan, is he to be trusted?"

"Not any farther than you could throw the Empire State building," she said bitterly. It was obvious to Shannon that she had not forgotten Carmen MacLeish and the very red Cadillac.

Nevertheless MacLeish seemed satisfied. He said, "The men are switching all the time. They get fired, or quit, and when their money's gone they go back to work, usually for the other company." He stared at Shannon. "It's simple enough to hire a job done."

Shannon was slightly incredulous. "You mean these guys wouldn't blackmail you afterward?"

"And incriminate themselves?"

"How'd you like me to put that on the front page of the *Clarion*?" Shannon demanded. His eyes were angry. "The men wouldn't stop to analyze your motives, or find out which accident was caused by whom. All they'd need would be a rope."

"I wouldn't like it," MacLeish admitted. Thick fingers explored the place where a noose might logically tighten. "No, I don't think I'd like that at all."

"Then there hadn't better be any more of these arranged accidents," Shannon said. It occurred to him that he had said practically the same words to Wolfgang Rygaard. Quite suddenly he realized that he was a big shot—if only temporarily. He felt omnipotent.

HE said, "I found out one thing you wanted to know, anyway. Whitey Loop is not with Rygaard."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"Then here's a little something on account," MacLeish said. From an inside pocket he produced a fat-looking envelope. Shannon's keen ear detected a pleasantly crisp rustling when he squeezed it. He put it in his pocket. "Thanks."

MacLeish was still thinking about Loop. "He may not be with Rygaard, but is he still with me?"

Shannon's expression was wooden. "I can find out."

CARMEN MacLeish found him brooding on the ills with which John J. Shannon was beset. She was vivid in black caracul and the kind of hat you see only in the movies. "Has Giles been here?"

Shannon admitted sadly that Giles had been there. "He's out having cocktails with a blonde."

"Well, that seems like a very good idea for you and me," Carmen said. Her green eyes appraised him. "Not the blonde—cocktails."

He avoided her eyes. "Was Giles home last night when you got back?"

Her hesitation was so brief that it might have passed unnoticed if he hadn't been watching for it. "Yes."

"The servants weren't so sure," he said. "They thought they heard a car just after we left the house."

She was a little angry now. "Just what are you trying to prove?"

"That Mrs. Thorelsen didn't kill Rose Machado."

"I see," she said in a flat voice. "You'd rather it was Giles?"

"I wouldn't like it," he confessed.

It was then that he heard muttered curses out in the anteroom, and stumbling, uneven footsteps. He thrust Carmen from him and his hand dropped to the gun in his pocket. Someone banged solidly against the door. Shannon went over, and Lew Kronjager lurched drunkenly into the room. In one large fist he had a bottle, and in the other a couple of water tumblers, apparently lifted from some restaurant. He was bleary-eyed. He did not see Carmen MacLeish. "Gotta talk to you," he informed Shannon. He winked owlishly. "You and me'll have little drink

and talk things over." He waved the bottle and almost fell down.

Shannon led him carefully to a chair. "All right, Lew. What's on your mind?"

Kronjager reached out a shaking hand. "Don't think because I'm drinking with you I don't hate your guts."

"That's all right," Shannon said. He sat on the edge of the desk, and though Kronjager didn't know it he was toasting Carmen MacLeish when he lifted his glass. "Here's to crime."

Kronjager gulped: "To crime," he said emotionally. He was on the brink of a crying jag. "Gotta find out where I stand," Kronjager said.

Shannon looked at Carmen, poised with her hand on the doorknob. His look said that this would only take a moment and that then they could go after the cocktails. He returned his attention to Kronjager. "Where you stand?"

"Unh-hunh. What I want to know is, are you and him trying to squeeze me out?"

Shannon laughed, "Worried, Lew?"

"You're damn right I am," Kronjager said loudly. "I keep tellin' the guy I know you and he won't believe it." He grew cunning. "Look, you say the word and I'll throw in with you."

"Against Whitey?"

"Yes."

Shannon swung his legs. "No."

Kronjager climbed unsteadily to his feet.

"I wish that slug had hit you."

"Out at the country club, you mean?"

"Yes."

Shannon slid off the desk. "Lew."

The change in his voice was noticeable, even to Kronjager. He licked his lips. "Unh?"

"Only three people in the world could have known that slug was meant for me, Lew."

Kronjager's sullen mind struggled with that for an instant. And then, when he saw what he had done, he began to sweat. Great beads of it stood out on his forehead and his eyes got a glassy look. "You're crazy!"

"Just three," Shannon said. He used his fingers to tick them off. "Miss McGowan, myself and the guy that fired it."

Kronjager went for his gun. Shannon actually stood there and let him get it half

way out before he stepped forward, like a punter, and drove a foot into the big man's paunch. Kronjager sighed and folded over. Shannon straightened him up with a left and a right to the face. After a while he became conscious that the face was no longer there in front of him. Surprised, he looked around and saw Carmen MacLeish standing by the door. Her face was dead white.

"What was the reason for that?"

"He just told us," Shannon said. He sucked at a split knuckle, and watched Kronjager try to get up and fail, picked up the phone and called City Hall.

XXIV

THREE people sat in a booth in the Cooper Pig, each watchful of the other two, each pretending that only the surface words were important. At least this was the impression that Shannon got. He knew that he himself was being careful, so there was no reason to suppose that the others weren't too. He thought that in spite of the difference in their colorings Carmen MacLeish and Floyd Loop were very much alike, sleek, beautiful cats, self-centered and, like cats, thoroughly unpredictable, because they were adepts at dissembling.

"All right, so you checked his gun with the slug that busted the mirror. What more do you want?"

"His motive," Loop said.

"Tell him what happened in the office, hon."

"I already have," she pointed out. She sipped at her rum Collins. "About three times."

Loop studied his well-kept nails. "So you were in Miss McGowan's room after all. Why did you lie to me?"

Shannon was indignant. "If I hadn't, would I have caught Kronjager? Anyway, what do you care?"

"I don't," Loop said.

Shannon thought that this was a lie. There was nobody to whom Kronjager's arrest could prove more embarrassing than to Whitey Loop. The chief of police was worried about what his lieutenant might say in court. Shannon casually offered him an out. "He could be shot, trying to escape."

Loop's lips moved. It looked as though he might be saying, "You fool," but no sound came out. He was quite conscious of Carmen MacLeish at his side. She laughed musically. "How too, too intriguing!"

"Cute," Shannon said. He really thought so. Not the suggestion itself, but the fact that Loop had probably already considered it and was now stymied because Shannon had brought it out into the open.

Entering his room later he discovered that there hadn't been any visitors. He knew this because everything was exactly as he had left it, and he had gone to great pains to memorize even the position of the pins in his clean shirts. He was a trifle disappointed. Ever since preparing that important-looking envelope at Wynn Thorelsen's place he had been expecting someone to take an interest in it, but no one had. It was discouraging. He decided to cheer himself by counting the money given him by Giles MacLeish and Wolfgang Rygaard. It was in the Rygaard batch that he found the marked hundred-dollar bill. He had marked it himself. It was the one he had left as a token of good faith in the apartment of Rose Machado.

XXV

SHANNON went into Loop's office and found a new man at Kronjager's desk, the squat, flat-faced detective Shannon had first seen in the squad car with Kronjager, immediately after his arrival in Las Cruces. This man viewed Shannon without love. He said, "What the hell do you want?"

"Is that any way to talk to prominent citizens?" Shannon reproved him. "Are you unaware of the power of the Press?"

The inner door opened and Chief of Police Floyd Loop looked out, saw Shannon and beckoned. "It's about time." He turned his eyes on Kronjager's successor. "You hear from that party yet?"

The squat man shook his head, no. It developed that his name was Belasco. "He ain't been seen since early last night."

Shannon wondered if they meant Pilsudski. He decided he wouldn't ask. Following Loop inside he discovered Miss Frances McGowan ensconced in the most

comfortable chair. He said, "Well, this is quite a surprise! I thought you were writing copy for the *Clarion*."

Loop sat at the desk. "As a matter of fact, I asked Miss McGowan to step over here for a moment." He pushed a cigarette box toward Shannon. "Just what are your ideas for the next front page?"

Shannon thought about that for a moment. "Kronjager's arrest would make a good head."

"Probably," Loop said. His cat eyes glowed. "Just the same, I don't think we'll use it."

"No?"

"No."

"All right," Shannon said amiably. "You and Miss McGowan figure it out." He took off his hat and molded it between strong, brown fingers. "Look, I'd like to see Mrs. Thorelsen for a minute."

"Why?"

Shannon scowled. "Because I don't want her thinking I'm a heel and leaving her flat." He did not see fit to mention certain evidence that it might have been someone else who had shot Rose Machado. For that matter, the marked hundred-dollar bill would not be worth a damn in court. There were no witnesses that he had marked it, or that he had left it with the woman.

Loop's chair creaked. "Where's St. Cyr?"

"I don't know," Shannon said. "Probably stinko in some gutter." He sighed. "Anyway, I couldn't find him."

The police chief took another tack. "You see Dawes tonight?"

"Unh hunh."

"What did you tell him?"

"To go to hell," Shannon said angrily.

"A lot of good that will do," Loop said just as angrily. He stood up. "Have you forgotten that he can put the heat on Lundy through Kronjager?"

Shannon looked at him. "I told you what you could do with Kronjager."

"In front of a witness!"

Frances yawned. "Not the luscious Carmen, I trust?"

Shannon flushed. "At least I was chaperoned!" He scowled at Loop. "Let her talk her head off if she wants to. If you're as smart as I think you are it won't prove anything." He became indignant.

"Anyway, what did you expect me to do? The guy offered to sell you out, didn't he? If I hadn't nailed him he'd have gone to somebody else."

"There's always that," Loop admitted. His golden eyes probed Shannon's face. "I guess we can fix things up in spite of Dawes."

"Sure we can." Shannon leered. "A prosecutor is no better than the jury he selects, and between you and me we can see that no matter who he selects—"

Loop laughed. "That will do to tell Kronjager, anyway. It will keep him quiet till something can be arranged."

"Sure."

"There's one other thing," Loop said. "What are you going to tell the men to-night?"

"Just enough so that they'll know we're on their side."

"Against the operators?"

"Not necessarily," Shannon said. He smiled. "We'll just want their help in clearing up the whole mess, that's all." He helped himself to a cigarette, pretending that he didn't see the look in Fran's eyes. "When we're solid with them we can put the squeeze on MacLeish and Rygaard or not, just as we choose." He flicked the burned match at a wastebasket. "Mueller was a piker."

Loop's eyes narrowed. "What about the guy coming in to take Mueller's place?"

"He'll be reasonable," Shannon said. He winked. "He'll be reasonable or else."

There was silence in the office for a little while. Finally Loop said in a curious voice, "Kronjager was right about one thing anyway. You've got more curves than a pretzel."

Frances, for once, seemed incapable of saying anything.

SHANNON turned toward the door. "How about seeing Mrs. Thorelsen?"

"All right," Loop said. He picked up the phone, and presently Shannon was following an unshaven turnkey down the stairs and along a corridor between two rows of steel-barred cells.

They came to a blank steel door painted to resemble wood, and the turnkey unlocked this and stood aside while Shannon went in. Wynn Thorelsen was lying face down on the couch. She was still in black.

At sound of his voice she rolled over on her side and looked at him. The mascara on her eyelashes was smudged a little, as though she might have been crying. Her hair was burnished copper. "What do you want?"

"Just to talk to you a while." He came and sat on the edge of the couch, his eyes darkening as she moved to avoid his touch. "I'm sorry if it looked as though I'd run out on you. I had some things to do."

"I know," she said dully. "You had some things to do before, too. So you had Vogel come up." She wiped her mouth on the back of a hand. "This time you sent St. Cyr."

"Wynn." There was that in his tone that forced her to look at him. "Let's not fight about things, hon. One way or another I'll get you out of here."

Her laugh was bitter. "With a year?"

"If you killed her," he said. After a while he said, "Did you?"

Gray eyes held sudden shadows and she put her hand to her throat, as though expecting the noose to be already there. "No."

Shannon sighed. "And you were just riding around all that time?"

"Yes." Again she laughed. It had a dry sound to it, like the rustle of dead leaves. "I don't expect you to believe me."

"It doesn't make any particular difference whether I do or not," he said in a flat voice. "I'm trying to help you." He stood up and began pacing the floor. "I've wound this town up like a clock spring, just trying to help you." He set fire to a cigarette and stuck it between her lips. "We're going to pretend somebody stole the gun." He laughed a little. "Maybe they did, at that." Narrowed eyes watched her draw smoke deep into her lungs. "The point is, who?"

"Rygaard."

He took off his hat and ran brown fingers through his dark hair. "Why?"

"That's obvious, isn't it? To shut her up about Bill."

"And why'd he kill Bill?"

She closed her eyes. "I don't know, Shan."

"I've got something that may help you—at least it tends to support your theory."

He told her about the hundred-dollar bill. "The trouble is, I can't see Rygaard lifting it any more than I could you. To a guy like him a C-note wouldn't be worth the risk."

"But if he didn't know it was marked?"

He shrugged. "It's a possibility." He looked at his watch and saw that it was almost eight o'clock. "Well, I'll be running along, then." He gave her a smile that he hoped had more cheer in it than he felt. "If I see St. Cyr I'll send him around to keep you company."

"Good night," she said. Then, very low, "And thanks a lot, Shan."

"Forget it."

The turnkey let him out and he went back along the noisy steel-barred corridor. This time he saw Kronjager. The big guy was standing with his bloated face pressed close to the bars, waiting for him. "You rat."

Shannon's breath came a little unevenly. "I'm going to tell you something for your own good, Lew. You took a shot at me and I shouldn't do it, but I'm going to." With one eye on the turnkey he leaned closer and lowered his voice. "Loop's planning to cross you up, pal. Anybody offers you a chance to escape, don't take it." He nodded pleasantly and continued on his way.

IN the office of Local 197 there were eleven men waiting for him. He did not know why there should be eleven, rather than nine, or twelve, but then he didn't know the slightest thing about grievance committees in general.

"Hello, boys."

A guy almost as big as Pilsudski shuffled his feet. "You Shannon?"

"Unh-huh."

"Well, what's this all about?"

"Aside from Mueller's stealing some of you blind, what's your biggest beef?"

Apparently the big guy had been appointed spokesman for the lot. He scowled. "So the operators give us ten grand if we get killed. So what the hell good is that?" He looked around. "You can't spend it if you're dead, can you?"

"You can always quit," Shannon said.

"And that's what we've decided to do," the man said. "We're calling a general strike until the operators quit using us

like dummies in a fight where we can't win."

Shannon decided that he would be doing Mr. O'Hara, in San Francisco, and maybe the unions as a whole, a disservice if he permitted the men to walk out now. He considered his words carefully. "I'm not saying the operators aren't responsible. I'm not saying they are, either. All I can tell you is that neither Rygaard nor MacLeish could handle these accidents all by themselves." He looked the big guy straight in the eye. "I'll give you six-two-and-even that some of your own pals have been hired to do the actual dirty work."

"So what?"

"So you've got to find 'em," Shannon said. His mouth drooped. "Look, I'm not a professional business agent. And about copper mining I don't know from nothing." He pointed a finger. "But one thing I do know and that's people. I know that wherever you find men in big bunches you'll find some that can be bought." He stood up. "It's up to you to catch these guys in your own ranks. They'll lead us to the guys that hired them."

Eleven men held a hasty conference. Finally the big guy once more addressed Shannon. "We can't do that if we call a walkout."

"No." He lit a cigarette and threw the match on the floor, which he considered a nice touch. "People call guys in my line a private eye. I want you to tip the men off that from now on they're all private eyes." Twin streams of smoke issued gustily from his nostrils. "Twenty thousand pairs of eyes ought to pick up something—if they know what they're looking for." He squinted a little. "That doesn't just mean while you're on shift, either. Look for guys that are spending more dough than they have any right to have on eight to twelve bucks a day." Thumb and forefinger snapped the butt at a spittoon. "And when you find 'em, bring 'em to me." He had their interest now, full and complete. He breathed a little sigh of relief. "Maybe a little publicity in the *Clarion* will stir things up for you. At least it ought to keep any more of you from getting killed."

A guy who talked like Pilsudski thrust his way forward. "Me, I t'ink you are

smart like anything, falla. By me it's hokay." He scowled at his fellows. "Hokay by you?"

It was okay by them.

SHANNON went into the other office and called Mr. Salter, editor and sometime publisher of the *Clarion*. "Look, here's what I want you to do." He outlined what he wanted done. "I don't care what you think, or what anybody else thinks. Who owns that lousy sheet, anyway?"

"You do," Salter admitted. And then, maliciously. "And believe me, pal, after this next issue she's all yours."

Shannon scowled. "I'll sell it to the union."

Salter thought this was very funny. "What for, scrap iron?" He made a peculiarly unlovely sound with his lips. "If there's anything to all this stink you're raising, somebody's going to toss a case of sixty per cent, *with* detonators, right smack through our front windows."

"I only hope you're there to see it," Shannon told him kindly. He hung up and was on the point of leaving the office for the night when the telephone rang. Mamie Costello's voice came over the wire, a little breathless, as though it had run all the way from Los Angeles. "Shan? I think I've got something!"

"You always did think you had something."

"Fool!" Mamie was indignant. "Look, you wanted me to check recent stock purchases in the Resurrection, presumably by a man named Rygaard, and I told you there weren't any."

Shannon's heavy brows drew down. "So now you've found out different?"

"So now," Mamie announced triumphantly, "I put reverse English on that order and looked up who was buying Las Cruces Consolidated." She paused to give weight to the coming disclosure. "And who do you think it was?"

"I'm holding my breath," Shannon said.

"A guy named Pilsudski!"

Involuntarily Shannon closed his eyes. "That louse!" he said, over and over again. "Look, how were these orders placed?"

"I thought of that, too," Mamie assured him loftily. "The couple of brokers I talked to got their instructions, and the

money, by mail. The certificates went to a box number in Phoenix." She gave Shannon the number. "Though that probably won't do you much good," she admitted. "Anybody can hire somebody else to rent a box for them."

Shannon toyed with the idea that maybe it was somebody else, using Pilsudski's name. Somebody, say, like Giles MacLeish, who appeared to want Las Cruces Consolidated, or at least to wreck it, more than anyone he could think of at the moment. "Okay, so you're smart. Did I ever say you weren't?" He had what he hoped was a brilliant thought. "Scout around some more, hon. Maybe somebody talked to this guy on the phone. If he did, find out what kind of a voice he had."

"What kind of a voice has Pilsudski got?"

Shannon sighed. "About what you'd expect of a guy with that kind of name." He attempted a rough version of Pilsudski's accent, but Mamie's raucous laughter discouraged him. "All right, but have photostats made of the letters anyway." He made a bitter mouth. "Personally, I don't think the guy can write." He disconnected and sat there a moment, hat down over his eyes, unhappy at the thought of how Pilsudski had fooled him.

Presently he took out his gun, looked at it, put it back in his pocket, got up and locked the office and went around to the garage where that morning he had rented a car. He drove out to the abandoned Dos Pesos. Pilsudski wasn't there any more. The shaft was quite empty.

XXVI

MAMIE COSTELLO'S second call caught Shannon just after his return to the Navarro. He took it in the phone booth in the lobby. "Shan, did you send Vogel down to Phoenix?"

Little prickles of apprehension stirred the hair at Shannon's nape. "Yes, why?"

"Well, something's happened to him," Mamie said. "The Phoenix cops called Minna, and Minna called me. She's about crazy."

"So am I!" Shannon yelled. "What do you mean, something's happened to him? What is this, a guessing game?"

"Don't shout," Mamie said. "I can hear you perfectly." She lowered her own voice. "The cops think it's an ordinary hit-and-run. They found him spread out all over a street."

Shannon's stomach tried to crawl up into his throat. Probably because of this his voice had a choked sound. "Dead?"

"Not yet," Mamie said. "There's a broken leg and an arm and half a dozen ribs." She began to whimper a little then, snuffling like a very small puppy. It's—it's the fractured skull they're worried about. They had to operate and they wouldn't do it without Minna's permission." She blew her nose loudly, angrily.

Shannon was staring at the blank wall of the booth with eyes that didn't see it. For the moment he had forgotten Pilsudski, and all he could think of was a small crushed body lying in some police hospital, and a girl with red lips and green eyes, a girl who had had to go down to Phoenix that evening and who drove a big red Cadillac like a fiend. "All right," he said presently, "I'll take care of it." He remembered Vogel's wife Minna. "You'd better go over and stay with her, hon. I'll call you back." He hung up and with stiff, oddly clumsy fingers fumbled some loose change out of his pocket and called the Phoenix police. It took him all of five minutes to find out where Vogel was, and that the operation had already been performed. A guy who said he was a police surgeon scorned the idea that Vogel might talk. "He's lucky to be breathing."

"You keep him breathing," Shannon said in a tight voice. "If you need any help, get it. I'll be down there in an hour or so and I'm expecting to find him alive."

It lacked a few minutes of eleven when he drove into Phoenix and came to Police Headquarters and the adjoining receiving hospital.

The surgeon with whom he had talked on the phone was a tall, sallow man who said his name was De Grasse. He and Shannon went into a narrow white room which smelled sickeningly of ether and antiseptic. Vogel's round body looked curiously flat under the covers on the bed. His head was a mass of bandages. Shannon's tonsils were two clenched fists in his throat as he went over and touched one of the pillows.

After a time he became conscious that two other guys had come into the room. Experience told him that they were dicks and that they were going to ask a lot of questions. It occurred to him that they must know Vogel was a private eye, and that he was, too. He looked at the surgeon. "Well?"

"He'll live," De Grasse said. His sallow face reflected professional pride. "For a man who has one foot in the grave himself I did pretty damn good." He looked at the two dicks. "Didn't I?"

"You sure did," the fat one said. The other man was small and hard as nails. His face was the color of saddle leather and looked just about as durable. Eyes as sharp and bright as jet beads looked Shannon over from head to foot. "What was he working on, shamus?"

"He wasn't working," Shannon said carefully. "He was on his way home." He drew a deep breath. "I sent him there."

A brief silence ensued. Finally the small man asked the question Shannon had been waiting for. "Why'd you send him home?"

"Because he wasn't any good to me up there." He became earnest. "If you know anything about Las Cruces you know how tough the cops are. They don't like private dicks in their midst. One of them recognized Vogel and he couldn't work."

"And what was he supposed to be working on?"

Shannon moved his shoulders impatiently. "A guy named Johann Smith. His wife wanted us to locate him."

The fat one let out his breath. "Well, I'll be damned."

"Fact," Shannon assured them. He spread his hands. "So you see it's just one of those things. Some guy hit him and scrambled the hell out. You might look for some dented fenders or something."

"We're already doing that."

"Good." Shannon touched the surgeon's arm. "You're sure he's going to be okay?"

"As sure as we can be of anything."

"When will he be able to talk?"

De Grasse shook his head. "That's something else again, my friend. Maybe twelve hours, maybe not for a couple of days." He pursed his lips. "But certainly not under twelve hours."

"Then I guess there's no use my sticking around here," Shannon said. He took out his billfold. "Anything he needs, special nurses, anything, I want him to have."

"We'll send you a bill," De Grasse said.

The fat detective put his good eye on Shannon's nose. "What's your hurry?"

"I've got to call his wife," Shannon knew better than to ask to see the contents of Vogel's pockets. Besides, he was pretty sure there was nothing of importance in them. If there had been, these two cops would have found it. They weren't dumb. He laid a hand, very gently, on Vogel's slow-moving chest. "See you around, Dutch." He was suddenly embarrassed under the eyes of the three men watching him. He yanked his hat on and thrust out a chin at Leatherface. "Okay for me to go?"

"It's all right with me," the small man said. He pretended to be greatly interested in the chart at the foot of the bed. "Stopping in Phoenix?"

"The Desert Inn," Shannon said.

But when he was once more outside he did not go directly to the hotel, nor did he call Minna Vogel. He spent five valuable minutes losing the tail the cops had waiting for him in a Chevrolet coupe that looked as though it belonged to a high school student.

He was not in a happy frame of mind when presently he hung up on Minna Vogel's wailing. He looked in the phone book for the address of the Polish Relief Society. He went into a stygian hallway that smelled like a dentist's office, fumbled around till he found a light switch, flicked it on and went up rubber-treaded stairs. At the top he found another switch and turned the lights off. A couple of matches guided him down the hall to the ground-glass door of the Polish Relief Society.

Another match showed him a Yale lock which looked stubborn, and besides he was in a hurry. He took out his gun, wrapped his hat around it and smacked the glass opposite the knob. Perhaps a square foot of glass fell out. Shannon reached through and unlocked the door. He could just as well have saved himself all the trouble. The furniture was still there, but the Polish Relief Society had moved out. There wasn't even a second-hand envelope to show that it had ever existed.

UNDER the impetus of two front pages, the like of which had never before appeared in Las Cruces, the *Clarion* was booming. Salter regarded Shannon with a jaundiced eye. "Twenty-five thousand copies, and I let you have it for a lousy five grand!"

"That's what you get for not being a crusader," Shannon said.

"I'll give you your dough back and a five-hundred-dollar profit," Salter offered.

"Hell," Shannon said, "you must have made that much out of the two extras."

"But you said you might even give it to the help when you were through with it!"

"Maybe I'm not through with it," Shannon said. He was, but that was strictly his own affair. He wondered why it hadn't occurred to Salter that after his, Shannon's, departure, the *Clarion* would probably fall right back into its normal slough of despond. He became magnanimous. "Look. Give me a thousand over and above the five and I'll sign the lousy sheet back to you right now."

"Wait a minute," Salter said. He answered the telephone. From the one side of the conversation he could hear Shannon gathered that it was some potential advertiser wanting to buy space. He wondered if perhaps he wasn't making a mistake in selling out so cheaply. Salter hung up with a resigned expression. "All right, you chiseler." He got out his check book.

"Make it it two checks," Shannon said. "Either that or give me the thousand in cash."

It was just after he had signed away all right and title to the *Clarion* that he saw George St. Cyr peering in at him from the street. He waved.

St. Cyr came in. "Hello, there." He was not as drunk as Shannon had seen him. He had a copy of the *Clarion* and his brown spaniel eyes were faintly disapproving. "I'm afraid the operators aren't going to like you, old fellow."

"The hell with them," Shannon said loftily. He lowered his voice. "You see Mrs. Thorelsen tonight?"

"I was just on my way over there," St. Cyr said.

"Tell her I've thought of a way to spring her, will you?"

St. Cyr regarded him. "Legally?"

Shannon looked mysterious. "Maybe

not, but as soon as I'm sure it wasn't her I can frame the guy."

"Who?"

"I don't know yet," Shannon said. "Probably MacLeish." He winked. "For that matter, her gun could have been stolen by either one, MacLeish or Rygaard." He thought of something. "Pilsudski's gone."

St. Cyr was startled. "No!"

"Fact," Shannon said. He sighed heavily. "That's the way with people. You trust 'em, you try to give 'em a break and they run out on you." He yanked at his rain-sodden hat. "No reason for it, either, unless he was the one instigating all these accidents. All I hid him out for was because the men might not have understood. They'd have lynched him."

Salter was an interested eavesdropper. "Now they'll only lynch the operators."

"I ought to slap your big ears down," Shannon told him. He drew St. Cyr aside. "Mind telling me why you divorced Carmen?"

Something that could have been pain made the tall man's eyes more like a spaniel's than ever. "I'd rather not discuss that, Shannon."

"Oh, a gentleman?"

St. Cyr looked at him. "Am I to understand that she is implicated?"

Shannon told him about Vogel. "Dutch had two things to look up—Carmen and the Polish Relief Society. I know that Carmen was going down to Phoenix. She told me so herself."

"But it could have been Pilsudski!"

Shannon's mouth made a firm hard line. "We'll know as soon as Vogel's able to talk." He went out.

WHITEY LOOP and the dick named Belasco came out of the Copper Pig, Belasco in a black rubber slicker, Loop in a gabardine waterproof. Shannon thought dispiritedly that even rain couldn't affect the handsome chief of police. Loop spotted him and crossed over. "Where the hell have you been?"

"Phoenix."

"Why?"

Shannon made a bitter mouth. "Some coyote in a two-ton truck had to pick tonight of all nights to run over a guy." He sighed. "The guy was Vogel."

Loop's cat eyes got an eager light in them. "Kill him?"

"Not quite," Shannon said. He appeared to be interested in his hands, which could have stood a good scrubbing at that. He'd had to change a tire on the way back. "Some of these squareheads are tougher than they look."

There was a scarcely discernible edge to Loop's smooth voice now. "Where is he?"

"The cops have got him," Shannon said.

If Loop was disappointed he didn't permit it to show. He dismissed Vogel with a shrug. "MacLeish and Rygaard are looking for you with fire in their eyes." He too had a copy of the *Clarion*. "You seem to have scared the pants off of them."

Shannon nodded. "Twenty thousand pairs of eyes would make anybody nervous." He laughed. "Don't worry, pal. They turn up anything, they've got instructions to bring the guys to me first."

"That reminds me," Loop said. "Your successor has arrived." His mouth twisted. "Credentialed and everything. He's up in the office now, going over Mueller's books."

Shannon was unimpressed. "What kind of a guy is he?"

"Honest," Loop said. You gathered from his tone that there was no worse indictment. "Honest and tough."

Shannon clucked his disapproval. After a while he said, "Well, you and I are tough, anyway." He took off his hat and slapped the accumulated rain from it.

For the first time Loop let irritation show through the veneer. "I wish I knew what you were doing—or at least that you knew what you are doing."

Shannon was surprised. "Why, we're cleaning up the town, that's all." He leered. "We're cleaning up all the loose ends, so we won't have any competition." He tossed the chief a bone. "We'll be needing a new mayor, pal. Pilsudski's gone."

Loop licked his lips. "How do you know?"

"I helped him get away," Shannon said. He was modestly pleased with himself. "Any little loose ends we can't pin on anybody else we can stick Pilsudski with."

"Sa-ay!" You could see that Pilsudski's absence opened up wide new vistas. "Shannon, I never thought I'd admit it, but I'm

glad you—" He broke off at a sudden thought. "Listen, Irish, you wouldn't be trying any of those famous curves on me, would you?" He patted the slight bulge beneath his left lapel. "Because if I find you are—if I even get the idea you are—"

Shannon decided to be offended. He was cut to the quick. "I can pull out now," he offered. "You figure you can't trust me, I'll pull out and leave you with it."

Loop's finely chiseled nostrils flared a little. "Never mind, just watch your step, that's all." He turned and recrossed the street to where Belasco was still waiting for him.

Shannon went up to the office of Local 197. There was a man sitting at the desk, immersed in a mass of papers. He looked like a middle-aged ex-pug. He glared at Shannon. "Well?"

"Not bad," Shannon said. "On the other hand, not so good, either." He closed the door and leaned his back against it. "I'm Shannon."

The man stood up. "The hell you are!"

"Well, I am," Shannon said. He took out Salter's check, the one for five thousand dollars. "I suppose Mueller told you I'd shaken him down for ten grand?"

"He mentioned it," the man said grimly.

Shannon laid the check on the desk. "There's half. The other half you'll have to collect from the chief of police." He put his hands in his pockets. "I'd suggest that you wait till, say, tomorrow afternoon before you go after it."

"Why?"

"Because if you don't you'll never get it." Shannon drew a deep breath. "Besides, you'll get me killed."

"Sit down," the man said. It developed that his name was Clancy, and after a while he and Shannon decided that they almost liked each other. Clancy even opened a drawer and got out a bottle of Irish whiskey. He filled the glasses and they drank a long life—in prison—to Max Mueller. Clancy held the bottle to the light and squinted one eye at it. "It's things like this that give the unions a bad name."

"Maybe we can give the operators a bad name too," Shannon said. "Anyway, they're going to think a long time before they try any more blitzkriegs. The men bring in any suspects yet?"

Clancy shook his head. "No."

"Too early," Shannon said. It occurred to him that he might precipitate matters by calling Wolfgang Rygaard and asking him what the hell he meant by stealing that hundred-dollar bill from Rose Machado. He decided he would wait a while. He would call Frances instead. He pulled the phone to him and gave the number of the country club. "Miss McGowan come in yet?"

"Yes," the steward said, "she is in, but I don't think she wishes to be disturbed. I heard her typewriter going only a few moments ago."

Shannon identified himself. "You go and disturb her anyway," he directed. "Tell her I've got a very important message."

The steward came back. He sounded agitated. "Really, I can't understand it," he said. "Miss McGowan seems to have disappeared."

XXVII

AN ELEVEN O'CLOCK sun came in the windows and dyed the office a faint saffron. "This is the part I always hate," Shannon said. "The part where you've got to explain everything you did." He was looking pretty good, considering that he'd been up all night and with the coming of the dawn had gone out and dug up part of a rocky hillside. He felt like the interlocutor in a minstrel show, only the people facing him weren't going to get up in a minute and start singing close harmony.

Perhaps the most complacent of the lot was Chief of Police Whitey Loop, and he didn't know what lay in store for him. The others, reading from left to right, included Giles MacLeish and his lovely daughter Carmen; the dick named Belasco who was keeping an eye on Wynn Thorelsen, next him; Mr. Wolfgang Rygaard, very cold and aloof; George St. Cyr, neatly brushed and smelling only faintly of Scotch; Mr. Kenesaw Dawes, the Lincoln-esque prosecuting attorney of Corona County, in sober black, and his somewhat nervous deputy, Mr. Alf Lundy. Against the door leaned a very fat man who had been introduced all around as the county coroner. His name was Dwiggins. "In a case of this kind," Shannon said, "it's always well to have the coroner on hand."

He smiled at Carmen MacLeish. "The coroner, you see, is the highest officer in a county. He can even arrest the sheriff."

Floyd Loop shifted in his chair a little at that. His cat eyes moved from Shannon's face to Dawes, saw nothing particularly menacing there and finally returned to Shannon. "All right, get on with it."

Shannon nodded. "Just to get everything straight for the records, Mrs. Thorelsen sent for me to come up here and investigate the alleged suicide of her husband. She seemed to think he had been murdered and I now have come to believe she was right." He sighed. "Unfortunately I can't prove it. I don't even know the exact motive." His eyes encompassed the circle of faces. "Perhaps some of you can help me. Mr. MacLeish, for instance, or Mr. Rygaard."

Giles MacLeish thrust his great head forward, like a bull about to charge. "What the hell do you mean by that?"

Rygaard said nothing at all.

Wynn Thorelsen drew a quivery little breath. "Shan, I—"

"You'll be all right, hon," Shannon said. He liked the way the sunlight lay in her coppery hair. He thought that redheads ought always to wear black. His mind returned to the business at hand. "What I meant to say was, all this talk of feuds and such would sound more reasonable if I knew what one of you two guys has that the other wants."

Rygaard's face remained blank. MacLeish scowled. "You know damned well what I want. I want Las Cruces Consolidated to quit wrecking my operations, and the only way I can stop that is to chase Rygaard out of the territory."

Rygaard looked at him with a kind of detached interest. "Try it," he invited.

"Well," Shannon said regretfully, "if you won't help me we'll have to skip that for a moment." He shrugged. "Maybe you don't know how valuable a property you've got." He meant Rygaard. "Thorelsen did. That's why he was killed."

Carmen MacLeish moved her chair a little closer to her father, almost protectively. Her green eyes watched Shannon as though he were someone she had never seen before. Wynn Thorelsen put the back of a hand to her mouth, held it there. Shadows lay in the hollows of her cheeks.

St. Cyr coughed apologetically. "Pardon me, old fellow, are you suggesting that Thorelsen knew something about Las Cruces Consolidated, and was killed for it, and you don't know what it is?"

"That's right," Shannon said.

"But I don't see—"

"It's pretty complicated," Shannon confessed. "I only know it's so because somebody has been spending every dollar he could get his hands on to buy Consolidated stock." He looked sleepy-eyed at Rygaard. "I hardly think he'd do that unless he had some inside information. Not on the recent earnings."

"No," Rygaard said softly. He stared at Giles MacLeish. "What name was this stock transferred to?"

"Pilsudski's."

Everybody looked terrifically surprised at that. "By the way," MacLeish said, "just where is Pilsudski?"

"He's dead," Shannon said. "I dug him up this morning." He poked at a blister in the palm of his hand. "Out by an abandoned silver claim called the Dos Pesos." He looked directly at St. Cyr. "It took two of us to get him out there. I knew you couldn't have carried him very far alone."

IF he had wanted drama he got it. Carmen MacLeish gave a stifled little cry. MacLeish cursed. Rygaard half rose from his chair.

St. Cyr's brown eyes got a hurt, bewildered look. "Really, old fellow—" He ran a shaking hand through his dead white hair and presently his bony knees gave way under him and he sat down. "I take it that I am being accused of murdering him?"

"Yes," Shannon had been even fonder of St. Cyr than he had of Pilsudski. "I'm sorry, George, but that's the way it's got to be. Not only Pilsudski, but Rose Machado, and before her, Thorelsen, and many others." He turned and looked out the window. It was easier to talk that way. "There was the bus too, and Dutch Vogel down in Phoenix. I ought to hate your guts, but somehow I don't. I even admire your nerve in sticking around when you must have known what was coming."

St. Cyr's voice came to him, mildly reproving. "You make me out rather a lively fellow, my friend. As an attorney

would you mind if I suggested a bit of proof is in order?"

"All right," Shannon said. He swung about and looked at Carmen MacLeish. "I'm sorry I can't lay the background and still be a gentleman." He laughed harshly. "Not that it matters. Nobody ever called me a gentleman anyway. I'm a cop."

"Don't mind me," she said. Her proud head was straight up. "I know what I am and I guess everybody else in town does too."

Her father touched her arm. "Carmen, please!"

She laughed, musically enough, but without mirth. Her green eyes met Shannon's black ones. "I've always done what I wanted to, I've slept with whom I pleased, when I pleased. St. Cyr just got tired of being laughed at, that's all."

"Thank you," Shannon said. Though he no longer wished to kiss her he admired her. He looked at the faces around him, faces that seemed to be suspended in mid-air, like ridiculous moons. "I think that's why I sympathize with St. Cyr's beginning this thing. If I had been in his shoes I'd have hated you too."

Loop's voice was irritable. "Come on, come on, don't go maudlin on us, Shannon!"

No, Shannon thought, no, I won't go maudlin on you. I'm going to hang you higher than a kite in a minute, but you're too self-centered to see it. Aloud he said, "St. Cyr's original objective was to hurt his ex-wife. The only way he could do that was through her father, possibly the one person in the world she really cared for." He could not look at the white-haired man with the bony knees and the spaniel eyes. "So he capitalized on a hatred that already existed between her father and Wolfgang Rygaard. By pitting one against the other, by arranging accidents to both, at least to their operations, he built up a situation that was almost bound to result in MacLeish's downfall and possibly his death." He put a cigarette in his mouth but forgot to light it. "Oddly enough, I don't think he felt any direct hatred for MacLeish himself."

George St. Cyr seemed to be standing up better than most. Shannon thought dully that maybe there was something to the

Old-School-tie-and-carry-on business after all. He made his voice carefully impersonal, like once when he had addressed a squad of rookies in police school. "It didn't occur to him until later that he could make some money out of the thing. When it did he helped Pilsudski organize the Polish Relief Society." He discovered the unlighted cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "I don't know yet how he swindled Pilsudski out of the dough."

"In fact," St. Cyr said genially, "in fact, my friend, you don't know anything." Crane-like he peered at the others. "In books, detectives can guess, but not in a court of law." He stretched his long tweed-clad legs out in front of him. "The defense rests."

"I know you got it," Shannon said stubbornly. "You got at least two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, as evidenced by your purchases of Las Cruces Consolidated stock."

"In the name of Jan Pilsudski?"

"But in your handwriting," Shannon said. He dragged smoke deep into his lungs. "And there was one telephone conversation remembered by a Los Angeles broker because Mr. Jan Pilsudski had such a very British accent." Shannon gave Mamie Costello full credit for this research. "Of course, if you can explain where you got all that money—"

"I don't think I shall try," St. Cyr said. He got up and took a very small gun out of his sleeve. Floyd Loop shot it out of his hand. It was not as neat a shot as the one he had practised on Shannon, possibly because this was such a very small gun. St. Cyr looked down at a handful of bloody fingers and keeled over in a dead faint.

Dwiggins, the coroner, looked like a horse doctor, but he managed to put a tourniquet on St. Cyr's arm and a fairly adequate temporary bandage on the smashed hand. Someone produced a bottle of brandy. St. Cyr opened his eyes and looked around. "Silly business, what?" He saw Shannon over by the windows. "Fainting, I mean."

Wynn Thorelsen stood up. "Shan, could I please—?"

"Go home?" He shook his head. "I'm afraid not, hon. You see, you were in it with him."

THERE was silence again, utter and absolute. Even the sombre Mr. Kene-saw Dawes looked surprised. Wynn just stood there, very straight and beautiful, and only the uneven rise and fall of her breasts showed the strain she was under. "You must be crazy," she said after a while. "It was I who sent for you." Her eyes took on a faint glaze as she stared from one to the other of those around her. "I've been in jail, accused of a murder I didn't commit. I've—" she turned the wide gray eyes full on Shannon. "Shan, you can't do this to me. Not after—"

His skin was suddenly an ugly yellow and stretched taut over his cheekbones. "You counted on me to get you out. You thought I'd do it even if I knew you were guilty." Laughter that was as dry as dust rattled in his throat. "I'd have done it too, if it had only been the Machado woman—if you'd had an honest beef."

St. Cyr's voice found a new strength. "Shannon."

"Well?"

"I'll make a deal with you. Turn her loose and I'll tell you what Thorelsen found out."

"I'll have to see your hand first, George." For the first time Shannon looked directly at the man. "Want to gamble?" He shrugged. "We could get it in time anyway."

"Not till hell freezes over," St. Cyr said. He looked at Rygaard and MacLeish, who seemed for the moment to have forgotten their differences. "You've been mining these mountains for twenty years and you still don't know what's there. Thorelsen himself just stumbled on it."

Rygaard moistened his thin lips. "Mine or his?"

St. Cyr laughed. "Why do you think I've been buying Consolidated? I'd have wrecked you both in order to get it all."

Wynn Thorelsen spat at him. "And you wrecked yourself over a lousy hundred-dollar bill." She swung on Shannon. "I'll take a chance. It's tin, that's what it is, T-I-N!" She sneered at Rygaard. "If you'd pushed some of those tunnels another ten feet east you'd have found it."

MacLeish sat down heavily.

Rygaard, who would benefit more than anybody, seemed curiously unaffected.

"Don't feel so sorry for yourself, MacLeish. It's probably only a pocket." He snapped his fingers. "They found some up in Canada too, remember?"

St. Cyr began to shake. The knowledge that even if he hadn't got caught it might all have been for nothing did something to his mental process. Deep-sunk eyes burned into Shannon's. "If you must have it, then, here's the hole card." He waved at Wynn Thorelsen. "This time it's not only her. We both go free."

"For what?"

"For Fran McGowan."

"I've already got Fran McGowan," Shannon said. "I followed you around half of last night till I finally figured out where you had her." He saw that St. Cyr didn't believe him. "Hon?"

Fran came out of the inner office. Aside from a very small lump on her head and a run in her stocking she looked quite normal. "Did you call me, darling?"

St. Cyr started to run and Loop and Belasco tackled him. It was Loop who cuffed him to Wynn Thorelsen, and it was while the chief's hands were thus engaged that Shannon came up behind him and got his gun. It was really quite a simple thing, but Shannon didn't let out his breath for ten seconds afterward. "Boy, what a relief!" He backed carefully away from the fury in Loop's eyes. "Even without the gun you scare the pants off of me."

Belasco looked stupidly from one to the other. "Hey, what goes on here?"

"Take him," Loop said through tight lips. "Take him!"

Belasco considered it. He considered everything, including the gun in Shannon's hand and the one under his own armpit. He decided the odds were too heavy. "I'm sorry, Whitey, I don't think I'd better."

Loop did a surprising thing then. The lines smoothed out of his face and he was once more his normal, handsome self. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Shannon." He smiled pleasantly at the whole group. "My apologies to everyone. After all, I'm only a gunsel, and a gunsel deprived of his gun feels kind of naked." He looked at Shannon. "I suppose it was you that persuaded Kronjager not to escape?"

"Unh-hunh."

"He seemed oddly stubborn about it when I offered him the chance." With a

faint shrug of his nicely tailored shoulders Loop turned to the desk. "Well, they can't give me more than ten years. If you're alive then I'll look you up, Shannon."

"Stand still," Shannon said.

Loop did not stand still. He spread out flat on the desk, opened a drawer and snaked out a spare gun. Shannon shot it out of his hand. "I've always wondered if I could do that," he said. He brought the gun back in a wide-armed sweep and knocked Belasco cold just as that gentleman was about to shoot him. Sweat ran down from under his nose and was salty on his lips. "Well, I guess that's that."

AFTER a while, after a long, long while, when everybody but Dawes and Dwiggins and Frances had either walked out, or been dragged out, Shannon dropped heavily into Whitey Loop's chair. "Am I tired?"

Mr. Dawes began pacing the floor, like Lincoln, with his hands clasped behind his back. "I'd like to see you in that chair permanently, Mr. Shannon."

"Unh-unh," Shannon said, "no, thanks." He looked out the windows at Front Street. "I appreciate the thought, though." He remembered where he was. "Tin! Why, I wouldn't live here if the streets were paved with solid gold."

Dr. Dwiggins, for a fat man, and a coroner at that, was about the least loquacious man Shannon had ever met. Aware that Dawes wanted his opinion, he said, "There'll have to be some things cleared up, of course." He helped himself to one of Whitey Loop's cigars. "What decided you on St. Cyr?"

"My message," Fran said promptly.

Shannon was outraged. "Your message!" He hauled a crumpled sheet of manuscript from his pocket and spread it out on the desk. "This will give you some idea of what I have to put up with."

The page was covered with a lot of drivel about this and that, and about a heel allegedly named Shannon, and down almost at the very bottom it looked as though Miss McGowan had become uncertain about the correct spelling of a word. It said, "Censor, Censure, Censer." Shannon sighed. "That's supposed to mean St. Cyr. She left it in her typewriter when he knocked her cold."

"Why. I think that was very smart," Mr. Dawes said. Even Lincoln was coming under her spell. "You saw him come in then?"

"In the mirror," Fran said. "I couldn't scream, and even if I had he'd probably have shot me. He looked positively mad." She herself did not look that way. She looked smug. "So I just went on typing, and I knew that if I actually put his name down he'd see it, so I thought of something that would sound like it, and there you are." She giggled. "And my hero found me, finally, in a dungeon or something that smelled of horses."

Shannon glared at her. "Are you all through?"

"With dungeons that smell like horses? You bet I am."

Shannon leaned back in the chair and put his feet on the desk. "Mrs. Thorelsen was a curious combination of intelligence and stupidity. She got me up here because she knew me; she knew me well enough to know that when people started pushing me around I'd probably do a little shoving on my own. What she and St. Cyr hoped to accomplish, of course, was the ultimate extinction of both Rygaard and MacLeish. Neither Rygaard nor Las Cruces Consolidated could go on taking a beating indefinitely. His owners would either fire him or sell out at a loss, in which case St. Cyr might reasonably have expected control." He lit a cigarette and allowed the smoke to dribble out of his mouth. "The Polish Relief Society worked two ways. Pilsudski—St. Cyr through Pilsudski—not only got ten grand for each man killed; Las Cruces Consolidated lost it." He laughed a little, and closed his eyes. "Smart, hunh?"

Both Dawes and the coroner agreed that it was smart.

"Besides," Shannon said, "St. Cyr was getting back at his ex-wife through her father. Every time something happened to Consolidated, Giles MacLeish got blamed for it, and Rygaard being the kind of guy he is, there were reprisals." He leaned forward and crushed out the cigarette. "Mrs. Thorelsen kept pointing me at Rygaard as the murderer of her husband, and for a while I thought he might be. Same with MacLeish. When I turned to him, that was all right with her too."

Dwiggins nodded. "In other words, she hoped that in one way or another you'd ignite an explosion."

"I told you she knew me. She thought that at one time I had been in love with her. She counted on that as a last resort."

"How?"

Shannon sat up straight. "On the face of it, the use of her own gun—Thorelsen's—for the Rose Machado kill looks stupid, but here is how it works: I'm supposed to think that she's being persecuted. Someone murders her husband; someone later steals her gun and kills a perjured witness and saddles the guilt on poor, defenseless Mrs. Thorelsen." He made a bitter mouth. "So I'm supposed to go around shooting people till I get the right guy. And even if I think she did it herself I can frame somebody, can't I? Why sure, I used to be in love with the gal!"

"Then she never considered her arrest a real danger?"

"Why," Shannon said, "even in books that's supposed to be an asset. She was smart enough to know that maybe she'd overplayed her hand once or twice with me. If something like the attack on Vogel happened while she was safe in jail, that in itself would remove any possible suspicion."

"But it didn't," Dawes said.

"The hell it didn't," Shannon said. "They've had me running around in circles for three days, largely because there were plenty of side angles, like Mueller and Loop and Kronjager and Rygaard and MacLeish. I kept telling myself it all tied in together but I couldn't see how. All I could do was start taking things apart one at a time." He thought about that for a little while. "Take the attack on the bus. For a time I thought that was meant for me."

"But it wasn't?"

Shannon shook his head. "Pilsudski, and indirectly either MacLeish or Rygaard. I think maybe Pilsudski was getting smart. Maybe he wasn't satisfied with forged letters of appreciation from some Polish ex-ambassador. And if the thing had come off, MacLeish had two excellent motives. Pilsudski had supplanted him as mayor; Pilsudski was running in labor that wasn't worth a damn and forcing it, through the union, down MacLeish's throat." He sighed. "No, St. Cyr had no means of knowing I

was on that bus. Mrs. Thorelsen probably told him I was coming; she could not have known when. And anyway, she wanted me here, alive and kicking."

"I hate to mention this," Dawes said. "You've done all you said you'd do, and more, but I feel that you are at least partially responsible for Pilsudski's death."

"I'm sorry," Shannon said, and he really was. He felt like hell about Pilsudski. "I could hardly foresee what happened. I even told him to hold anybody that came around except our mutual attorney." He got to his feet. "Let's wind this up in a hurry. I've got a bad taste in my mouth."

Mr. Dawes pursed his lips. "Now let's see. Thorelsen discovered the tin while his superior, Rygaard, was away." His Lincolnesque brows drew down. "Mrs. Thorelsen seems to have introduced an element of truth here. She told you he was very excited about something that night."

Shannon kicked the wastebasket. "She had to offer some kind of a motive for his murder. If she couldn't make me believe that he had been murdered I wouldn't do anything."

"In reality," Dawes continued, "we infer that she and St. Cyr were already involved in a clandestine affair; that she thought her husband was a fool to announce his find to his employers, and that when he insisted, she and St. Cyr killed him."

"And bribed the Machado woman to come forward with a phony suicide motive. At least it was supposed to look phony to me, so that when she, too, was killed there would be two murders chalked up against Rygaard." Shannon took a breath. "I have no doubt that some framed evidence incriminating him would have appeared later." He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and did a little pacing himself. "Funny about that marked bill. St. Cyr had been living practically in poverty, stinting himself so that he'd have just that much more with which to buy stock. I guess he couldn't resist the hundred bucks lying right there in front of him."

"He didn't know it was marked, of course."

"Not until Mrs. Thorelsen told him," Shannon said. He looked at Dwiggins. "On his return from Phoenix he ran into a front page of the *Clarion* that scared the

hell out of him. With twenty thousand pairs of eyes really on the job it was a cinch that one or more of his hired saboteurs would be turned up." He sighed. "Then he went across to the jail and learned from Wynn Thorelsen about the marked bill. He knew it could be traced back on him, as it has been—from Rygaard to a bartender who remembered where he got it." He resisted the impulse to look smart. "When I left that information with her I still wasn't sure. I just thought she was a possibility." He described his baiting of a trap with the important-looking Manila envelope. "I gave plenty of people a chance to look at it, but nobody was interested. The only person who could actually know that it contained nothing of value was Wynn Thorelsen." She helped me prepare it." His eyes grew dark and unhappy. "It occurred to me that her story of a previous robbery might be a lie. I didn't know why."

"Tell me one thing," Dawes said. "Why didn't he run?"

"Because Mrs. Thorelsen's arrest turned out to be a boomerang. She was in jail, and I suppose that in his way he loved her. Besides, if he'd run out on her, she'd have talked and we'd have got him eventually anyway." Shannon sat heavily in the chair at the desk. "No, his best bet was to spar for time and hope for a break. Vogel wasn't going to be able to talk for ten or twelve hours at least. St. Cyr didn't know I'd been investigating the stock angle, and anyway he thought he had that covered by a Pilsudski who would have vanished into thin air." His mouth twisted. "As for me, I hadn't any definite word from Mamie Costello until this morning, I couldn't even look for Pilsudski's grave until daylight." He scowled at Frances. "Sure, I had him on a kidnap charge, but I didn't have a motive for any of it."

"And he didn't know you'd found her!" Dwiggins marveled. He smiled paternally on Miss McGowan. "You were to be his anchor to windward, my dear, and, if I may say so, a very lovely anchor indeed." "Around my neck," Shannon said churlishly.

Dawes looked at him with curious eyes. "It's odd that it should have been St. Cyr

who kept Pilsudski from strangling you."

"What's funny about that?" Shannon demanded. "I saved St. Cyr from some dynamite, didn't I?" He shook Fran's hand from his shoulder. "I don't care, damn it, I feel bad enough without being reminded of things." He pointed a finger at the Lincoln-esque nose. "And anyway, I tell you he needed me, and Pilsudski was becoming a nuisance. He was probably sore as hell because he busted the chair instead of Pilsudski's head."

It was at this moment that the outer door opened and Carmen MacLeisch looked in. "Will you call me later, darling?"

Shannon scowled, "No."

The door banged loudly and she was gone. Miss McGowan smiled. "That's a nice man, darling. Mama will give you a gold star for that."

Shannon glared at her. And then, quite suddenly, he was pleased. He smiled for the benefit of Mr. Dawes and Coroner Dwiggins. "Anything else?"

They said no, they didn't think there was anything else. They went out. Shannon was on the point of seizing Miss McGowan in his arms when the telephone rang. He looked at it suspiciously. "Now what?" Finally, though, when it kept ringing, he picked it up gingerly and admitted that his name was Shannon.

His caller was the publisher of the *Clarion*. "Just to show you the kind of coverage we've got, there's a guy in here from Safford with a three-day-old copy of your ad. Says he's Johann Smith."

Shannon wet his lips. "He can't be. There isn't any such man. He's a— a figment of the imagination."

"Like hell he is," Salter said indignantly. "He's standing right here beside me with an armload of proof."

Shannon's eyes were haunted. "Tell him it was a mistake."

"Not me," Salter said. "I'll let you tell him." He lowered his voice. "From where I'm sitting he looks about nine feet tall."

The telephone fell from nerveless fingers.

Miss McGowan regarded him fondly. "It's all a part of the great Shannon tradition, darling." She sighed a little. "Never a dull moment."

Satan HAS SIX FINGERS

by VERA KELSEY



SATAN HAS SIX FINGERS

By VERA KELSEY

HER wrist watch marked midnight exactly. Only seven minutes since Jay had telephoned! What had possessed her to seize the first coat her fingers touched and race out of the apartment like a zany? She did not even know where he had been when he called. It might be half an hour or more before he arrived.

Automatically she dipped before the blurred mirror of a peanut-and-chewing-gum machine that bulged from the side of a pillar along the edge of the platform. As she shook her shining shoulder bob into place the mirror reflected an attractive and intelligent face, framed in that soft, dark brown hair. A slender face with clear, candid gray eyes, a short, straight nose, and a mouth whose slender lips were intended to curve up naturally at the corners.

But she saw only that the face was too pale and thin, the eyes shadowed and tight, her lips drooping with fatigue.

"Twenty-seven will seem old enough to Jay without looking haggish," she thought. Fishing a compact from a pocket, she began expertly to work with her lipstick. "I would have had time to glamorize a little—"

She was alone in the vast dimness of the station. At any time a subway station was not an inviting spot, but at midnight how vast and empty and still one could be! And how chill! Above on the streets, the air was cool, too, but alive and sweet after early-June rains. Here all the accumulated mugginess of the long, cold spring seemed concentrated.

She drew her light coat about her and restlessly began to pace up and down. How long till the next train? Five minutes? Ten?

Why couldn't Jay have come to her apartment? Why had he insisted in that

low, hurried voice that she meet him in the station? Not only in the station but at the doors of the last car!

Her lips did tilt a little then. Jay was just like his father, Paul Oliver. Paul could generate that same intensity of pressure when he wanted something. Now Jay—and after five years of silence!—had telephoned her to meet him here, and she had responded like a monkey on a stick.

But why such haste tonight if, as he had said, he had been in New York since Wednesday? This was Friday. No, Saturday, really. Where had he been in the meantime that he could not call her? And where had he come from? Not India, surely!

And what would he be like after five years? Her thoughts flew back to that year—that happiest year, perhaps—when, just out of college and the world her own very pearly oyster, she had joined Paul and Eleanor and their adored and adorable Jay in Singapore.

Jay, then a tall, blond giant of eighteen, with steady, laughing blue eyes, had made life a peril for all of them with his outrageous pranks. And a burden for her because of his insatiable interest in everything American. At such times she had found him a little pitiful—so ardently American himself, yet with hardly more than a year of his life altogether spent in his own country.

Suddenly she knew why she had raced out of the apartment and down Seventh Avenue to this stark and lonely station to meet him. There had been neither laughter nor interest in his hurried whispering. There had been fear!

JAY must be alone in New York. And in some sort of jam. Then where were Paul and Eleanor? Still in India? Eleanor's last letter had said something ..

about Universal Electric transferring Paul to another country. . . .

Oh, why didn't she ever answer letters! Then she'd know about her friends. That letter from Eleanor had arrived four years ago! But surely if they had been transferred she would have heard.

She peered into the blackness again. Were those two flecks, like tiny savage eyes gleaming in the depths of the tunnel, moving lights? As she watched, the flecks grew larger, brighter, rapidly. In her ears a faint vibration hummed.

Relieved, she stepped back. What nonsense she had been thinking? She must have read into Jay's words more than he meant. A spring cold could account for his voice. Perhaps all he wanted was a small loan.

Then why was she trembling? The cold, of course. If Jay did not step off this train he would have to come to the apartment. After all, she was a working girl. She couldn't arrive in the office sniffling.

The train was almost on her now. Lights and bumbling roar announced its approach as if it were some celebrated transcontinental streamliner.

Now it was rushing glaring cars past her. Again only here and there a weary passenger sagged against a wicker seat.

As it slowed to a stop she glimpsed two men, chins on chests, hats over their eyes, in the next to the last car. Not far from them an old, fat woman dozed over a basket. A moment more and the train stopped. She found herself within a foot or two of the central doors of the last car.

At first glance it appeared empty. Then as the doors slid back she saw, far down in the corner of a seat, the hunched shoulders of a man, his head bent forward.

That could not be Jay. He would have been standing at the door, waiting to leap out. Disappointed, irritated, too, Penelope turned away. Then resolutely swung back and entered the car. She had to be sure.

Close-cut fair hair beneath the tilted hat, a lean figure in English tweeds, smart topcoat slung about his shoulders, reassured her. Certainly this was Jay.

She tried to keep her voice light, though in the reaction of relief she was angry. "Come out from behind that fedora, Jay

Oliver! I know you." When he did not answer she leaned over and pulled up the hat.

Jay! A very tired Jay, she saw then. His face was greenish-white and sunken for so young a man. His eyes were closed. "Wake up, Jay," she urged gently and shook his arm.

Startled, she stepped back, dropping his hat. Jay was moving, but not to rise. He was falling—forward. As she put out an arm to support him he fell against her woodenly, pushing her slight figure back. Then he slumped, a dead weight, to the floor.

"Jay!" She stooped to raise him. Unsuccessful and frightened now, she straightened, looked about. She must get Jay out before they were carried away! How did one hold a train? Why didn't someone come? The pressure of time before the doors closed numbed her power to think.

A warning shudder ran through the train. She abandoned thought of the men in the car ahead. The agent in the change booth—he would know how to hold the train. . . .

As her feet touched the platform a sense of movement behind her spun her round. The doors were sliding together!

She tried to run but could not. Her feet had turned to stone.

As the car drew away before her starting eyes her last impression was of Jay's fair head on the grimy floor beneath the glare of light. Then darkness, whirling up in clouds from the concrete platform, rushing in from all sides, sucked her forward and down. . . .

II

"IF she wakes in her right mind she may be able to leave within a day or two. For a rest somewhere, of course. But if this fixation about dead men in the subway continues—"

Listening to her nurse's crisp, impersonal voice, Penelope remained with eyes closed, both to hide that she was awake and that she was uneasy to the point of fright. But when Miss Duke's voice faltered oddly she opened one eye. What she saw opened the other.

In the dimness of the corridor, beyond

the erect, starched white back a man's forearm, clad in the light wool of a top-coat, had swung up. And the thumb of the doubled hand was jerking an unmistakable invitation for the nurse to join him outside the room. As Penelope watched, Miss Duke stiffened, hesitated, stepped forward, closing the door quietly behind her.

Penelope stiffened, too. Was a closing door always to remind her of those subway doors closing in her face?

She repressed an impulse to ring for the nurse, for anyone, to demand for the hundredth time that something be done to find Jay. Something had been done. With results that had boomeranged against her. That was why her eyes were tight with uneasiness.

Her doctor—Dr. Traine—had listened to her frantic demands. Then after examining her he had given her some little white powders to put her to sleep, and gone his way.

Andrea Mills, with whom she shared an apartment in the Village, had hurried over with flowers and sympathy. She had listened, too, to exclaim, "Poor darling! You must see now you need a long rest."

Pepperpot, her editor and friend in need and out, had strolled in with overdone nonchalance. He had assured her the *Chronicle-Leader* could survive if she took a long, long leave. He had listened, also, asked a few questions, and gone away.

But he had returned, armed with books and flowers, possibly in apology for what he had to say. An expert newspaperman, he repeated without implications what he had learned. And he had tipped the scales against her.

No man, ill, injured, or dead, had been found on any west-side, southbound subway train at any hour during Friday night. The agent in the change booth at Houston Street had noticed three or four men, the worse for wear and liquor, stagger off a train sometime after midnight. But when they negotiated the stairs to the street safely he had thought no more about them.

Then, still holding Penelope's gaze with his own, Pepperpot had repeated the words of the unseen man in the change booth of the Christopher Street station.

"She came down here like a bolt out of the blue just at midnight Friday and

a train right there if she wanted to take it. But no, she starts pacing up and down like a panther or something. When I don't see her on the next train I run out on the platform. There she was—out cold. Just didn't have the nerve to go through with it, I guess." He had called for an ambulance, and that was that as far as he was concerned.

"And that's that for you, too, Pen, I guess," Pepperpot had concluded. When she didn't answer he had leaned forward to study her anxiously. "Isn't it?"

"I see what you mean," she had admitted finally. "But that isn't that—yet, Pepperpot."

With a sigh he had lifted his long, loose body from the straight bedside chair, fumbled a moment with her pillow, and departed. She had turned to face the white wall and the issue Pepperpot had made so clear without words. She must wake in her right mind—or else!

ADRY rustle informed her Miss Dake was again in the room, coming toward the bed. Penelope did not turn or open her eyes. Nor did she move when she thought she felt a cautious hand under her pillow. But the crackle of paper was too realistic a sound to imagine. She turned round and sat up. To see Miss Dake straightening, some letters and a package in her hand.

"What's that, Nurse? Mail?"

Almost human exasperation flicked across the cool hazel eyes. "Did I wake you? Sorry."

With her free hand Miss Dake plumped up Penelope's pillows behind her. "Mr. Murdock—you call him Pepperpot, don't you?—left these under your pillow."

"But why are you taking them away?"

Faint color stained the nurse's untinted cheeks. "I'm not taking them away. That is, I was going to put them on your supper tray—and open this little package for you."

Penelope flushed, too. Embarrassed but troubled by something new and watchful in the nurse's manner, she dropped her eyes. Suddenly stiffened.

Miss Dake's hand, moving toward the pocket of her apron, had jerked away. Penelope's glance, focusing there, spied inside one corner a tiny square of dull green; like mold or mildew. In all her waking

hours no blemish had marred those immaculate uniforms and aprons. Certainly that little square had not been there less than half an hour ago when Dr. Traine departed and she had closed her eyes, pretending to sleep. Her idle mind fussed with it irritably. Where in this wilderness of hygienic white could one touch green—much less mildew? Mildewed green . . . She caught her breath. A greenback folded in a tiny square could look like that—through white!

Conscious of the nurse stiffly waiting, she raised her eyes, tried to smile an apology. "I—I guess you startled me, Miss Dake. Don't bother about the mail. I can open it. Andrea brought me scissors in that manicure outfit."

As if in apology, too, Miss Dake gave her scissors and mail, asking idly, "Andrea? Is she with the *Chronicle-Leader*, too?"

"No. Just a friend." Penelope was turning the little square package over curiously, studying its London post-mark, the unfamiliar name on the corner card, its various stamps and registered markings.

"You and she live together in an apartment near here, I think she told me?" Miss Dake's words were blurred.

From the corner of an eye Penelope observed the nurse behind her, studying the package also. She dropped it carelessly, face down, on the bed, took up a letter.

"Did some kind friend bring me cigarettes? I could use one now."

Miss Dake moved forward, shaking her head.

"Not even that man at the door when I woke up? Who was he, by the way?"

Miss Dake turned abruptly and started for the door. "Sorry. Just one of the interns asking about Dr. Traine's schedule."

PENELOPE fixed her eyes on the letter and her ears on the nurse's footsteps in the corridor. When they died away she cut and ripped the package open.

Inside was an envelope, largely inscribed, "Read this first." Beneath it, a carefully wrapped and sealed oval, bedded in cotton. Relief surged over her when she recognized in the agitated scrawl sweeping across the page the boyish tracks of Jay Oliver, only slightly improved.

The first words set her fingers trembling. She gripped the paper tighter to read:

PENNY—I hope to reach New York before this package. If I do I'll explain and collect it from you unopened when it arrives. If you receive it first, hurry it into the safest bank vault you know. But if you do not hear from me, yet have reason to believe I'm in New York, take it yourself to Rio de Janeiro and give it to Mother. No one else. Cable her through the New York U.E. you are coming. Give any excuse you like, but don't mention me or the package. Open it if necessary for concealment, but don't be too curious about what it contains. And don't think I'm joking! This means everything to many people besides the Olivers. Be careful of it—and of yourself—though if I thought anyone could trace it to you I wouldn't be writing this now.

J. O.

Penelope read and reread the note, each time more slowly and thoughtfully. Her eyes were moist when finally she tore it into bits. How like Jay to say nothing of his own danger! But how unlike Eleanor to permit him to step into any hardship or peril!

Thought of the boy's white face, so drawn and still, sent a tremor over her. If Jay had lost his life attempting to get this to his mother the responsibility he had placed on her was heavy indeed. Swiftly gathering up wrapping paper, box, and bits of letter, she was out of bed, hurrying for her bathroom.

There while water crashed into the tub she unwrapped the little oval. For a long minute she gazed at what she found, incredulous. The longer she looked, the less possible it was to justify either Jay's letter or what she had seen in the subway car.

A crude clay elephant, trunk and legs folded round the body to give it the smooth outline of a very large egg, lay in the cradle of her hand. Surely it was nothing more than another of Jay's amateur efforts at modeling.

When Miss Dake returned with her supper tray Penelope was just emerging from the bath. Her face shone from soap and water. Her long bob was rolled up and bound tightly round her head with a broad green scarf.

The nurse's eyes sped to the bed where letters lay still unopened. "That gift must have been something pretty special to have caused this transformation," she suggested. When Penelope only smiled she added, "I hope it was nothing to eat. Better let us decide your diet for a few days."

Penelope slipped into bed, fanning her wits for an answer. All at once fatigue seemed to have left her. Deep in her heart still lay heavy dread for Jay, but now she knew she had not been deluded, she felt as if her blood had started to circulate again, energy to pour back into her. And now she knew something she could do, she was impatient to do it.

"If that's food," she cried, "give it to me. I'm starving."

Miss Dake arranged the tray on the bed table beside her. Then with a professional glance about the room turned again for the door. "If you don't need me, Miss Paget, I'll take my walk now."

Penelope, deep in thought, ate what was before her with little idea of what it was. A rap on her door brought her upright. When Pepperpot's long head thrust in she sank back with relief.

"Met your private battleship downstairs," he greeted her, dumping more magazines and newspapers on his way to her side. "She said you were all right. That I could come up. But I didn't like that look in your eyes just now. You are all right, aren't you?"

"In my right mind? I've never been out of it, Pepperpot."

He swung the bedside chair around to face her and sat down, smiling. "So—?"

"So—I'm all right. Except—I guess you win. I do need a rest. A long one."

"Any ideas?" He wasn't smiling now.

"I thought of a trip to South America. You know—long sea voyage—tropical sunshine—"

"Rio is a beautiful city, they say. And the Olivers would be glad to see you."

PEPERPOT looked innocent. "As an editor, Miss Paget, it's my duty to keep up with times. There's a war on, or has that escaped your attention? Many international corporations are bringing their overseas staffs home. I called the foreign department of the Universal Electric to learn their policy on men in foreign service.

And, of course, asked about my old friends, the Olivers. Paul, it seems, is now managing director of the U.E. plant in Brazil. Headquarters, Rio."

Penelope could not penetrate behind the righteousness of his gaze. But she knew him too well to believe his words contained only one meaning.

"Then you—you don't think I imagined that telephone call? That I saw Jay?"

He closed one eye slightly. "On that theme, the less said the better. Now I'll as a question. The answer is yes or no. The *Paraguay* is sailing for Rio next Friday night. Do you want me to cable Paul Oliver you'll be on it?"

"Yes." Penelope put out a hand and seized his. "How did you—?"

"I'm asking the questions." He edged his chair forward and dropped his voice.

"Have any visitors this afternoon?"

"One."

"Who?"

Penelope looked at him steadily. "I don't know. Miss Dake saw him. Profitably. If she didn't have a greenback in her pocket afterward, my years on your pay roll have been wasted. She said he was an intern—but these little eyes saw what they saw. Why?"

"Andrea. She returned home this evening to find that someone had gone through your apartment with a fine-tooth comb. I've just moved her to a hotel temporarily. And you're to stay right here until that ship sails. Unless"—he edged still closer—"someone else can take it down for you."

Penelope held herself still. "How you talk!" she said lightly after a moment.

"See here, Pen." Pepperpot regarded her sternly. "Whether you've stepped into something deliberately or not, I don't know. But don't try to play this alone. Jay must have been trying to get something to you. That's obvious, isn't it? It is to me—and to perhaps a couple or three other guys who followed him. He didn't have it on him or they wouldn't have searched your apartment. They didn't find it there or they wouldn't have come here to corrupt Miss Dake. They must believe—as I do—that somehow he did get it to you. Perhaps in that package I brought you earlier—"

He sat back suddenly to grin at her. "And, holy mackerel, I know where it is. Very becoming, too. But are you sure you

can manage? I'd say Miss Dake's going to earn that money searching your room."

"I'm sure." Penelope's eyes flicked a warning toward the door.

He thrust back his chair and rose as the nurse entered the room. "Friday, then? I'll drive you down myself."

"We win, Miss Dake," Pepperpot informed her. "Miss Paget has agreed to a long rest. If you can hold her together till Friday I'll take her to my mother in Pennsylvania for as long as she'll stay." He looked at Miss Dake gravely. "We consider Miss Paget a very valuable property on the *Chronicle*. If anything upset her we'd take it—very hard."

"How nice! About the rest in the country, I mean." Miss Dake hastily opened the drawer in the table, took out two white packets, poured a glass of water, and stood waiting.

Pepperpot backed toward the door. But there he paused to give Penelope a long glance before he disappeared.

"Till Friday," she said, taking the glass and lifting it to him in salute.

Obediently she opened her mouth for the powders, drank the water, and settled back on her pillows. "Good night, Miss Dake." She closed her eyes lest they betray her knowledge that as soon as the powders held her in sleep the nurse was going to hunt for the contents of that little box.

At that, she thought, those cool hazel eyes might make more out of that little elephant than she could. To her it was just a hard lump, growing harder.

"Four days more," she assured herself, "and Ellie and I will both be at sea. . . ."

PENELOPE, hidden behind the door of the empty cabin opposite her own, was peering through the slit of the door-jamb.

At that moment the latch of her own door was motionless. But when she had touched it, it had turned slowly, stealthily in her hand.

Someone was in her cabin. Someone intent now on making an unobserved exit. Perhaps he—or she—had felt her hand on the latch. Perhaps had heard some movement when she deserted the door so precipitously.

Her stewardess was off duty at that after-luncheon hour. Her cabin boy, some

distance down the main corridor, was sorting a mound of linen. Who, then, could this be?

Crouched behind one door, peering at another as the moments ticked away, Penelope began to prickle with alarm. Could she have imagined that turning latch?

Almost with relief she saw it begin to move again—slowly—noiselessly. Quarter inch by quarter inch her door opened, then swung wide. She stifled the gasp that rose to her lips as for the space of a breath she saw the man who emerged—book in hand! The next he was gone, hurrying down the short passage to the main corridor.

Incredulous, again mistrusting her own senses, Penelope sped for her cabin. Nothing, so far as she could see, had been taken away. Nothing added. Puzzled, she turned to the couch where a mound of *bon voyage* books made a bright spot in the room with their shining new jackets. Seventeen had been given her. Seventeen were there.

Reassured, she returned to her chair in a quiet bay on B Deck.

Only three chairs were set up in that bay. Her own on one side, two on the other. In one, lying as usual with eyes closed and hands quiet on the arms of his chair, was the gentle sad-faced old man she knew only as Dr. Rosario.

In the other, upright, alert, and now annoyed as he caught sight of her, was a small and very dapper young man. Secretary or nurse, he never for a moment left the older man alone. Now his black eyes fixed on her like needles.

Though annoyed herself at his resentment of her presence in that bay, Penelope had no thought for him now. Her attention was for the old man who gave every appearance of having lain in his chair for some time. Yet it had been that old man who had stepped from her cabin! She could not be mistaken.

There was nothing inert or depressed about the secretary-nurse—Senhor Rodrigo, as the old man called him. He guarded Dr. Rosario like an electric eye, aware of everyone and everything that moved on that starboard side of B Deck.

Occasionally he would lean over the older man, talk to him rapidly in some foreign tongue. Sometimes he appeared

to plead, sometimes to urge. The last two days he had seemed to command. At first Dr. Rosario had replied in a low, cultivated voice. Since yesterday he had neither answered nor changed expression.

Conscious of Rodrigo's eyes on her now, Penelope half closed her own and settled her head against the pillow. But through her long tilted lashes she continued to watch with increasing interest.

Perhaps because this was the first time she had really concentrated on them, she recognized an antagonism between them. That there was more than sad weariness in the old man's face. That he was not so passive as he looked. His pale lips were set; his veined hands gripped the chair arms until the knuckles stood out in bony ridges, marked with white.

SOME change in the insistent voice across the bay roused her. Senhor Rodrigo was standing, his back to her, gesturing furiously as he talked. His urgency contrasted strikingly with the old man's rigid silence.

As she watched Dr. Rosario stirred, opened eyes so deeply sunken beneath bushy gray brows that she only knew from a flicker of the lids he had opened them. Without speaking a word he shook his head in unmistakable finality.

The young man's slender shoulders jerked, sagged. He stood motionless, looking down at his charge as if utterly baffled or defeated. Then with a shrug he turned to the rail to gaze out over the sparkling blue Atlantic. His whole attitude proclaimed his indifference to any further responsibility for his companion.

Fascinated by the intensity of the two, Penelope had not realized how much time had elapsed or that the ship was now humming with activity. Aft on B Deck sailors were rigging a ship's ladder. From A Deck a chorus of voices drifted down, exclaiming, laughing. Turning her glance seaward, she saw the low shores of Barbados slipping by. Pastel-colored houses, green palms, and white sand all blazed with sun.

The beat of the engines changed, slowed, rumbled into silence. The breeze died as the ship swung at anchor. Launches were already speeding toward it. Behind them trailed a fleet of canoes in which Negroes,

so brown they appeared purple in the tropical light, shouted and gesticulated as they came.

Although she had no interest in going ashore Penelope did exert herself to reach the rail to watch the Negroes diving into the dark blue depths for coins thrown from the ship. And slowly, while launch after launch filled with shore-bound tourists, she edged aft until she stood near the stairway leading down to the water.

As a launch sped off with the last of the noisy groups an officer raised his arm to wave away the next in line. "No, wait," another said. "Here come two more."

Following his surprised glance, Penelope looked too. Dr. Rosario and Senhor Rodrigo were approaching. Startled by the change apparent in both of them, she stared openly.

The old man came first, slowly, with dignity, but with a heavy, lagging step. His face was set in an expression of despair, resignation—Penelope could not identify it clearly. As he reached her, his eyes plunged into hers with an appeal or message so urgent that in instinctive response she took a step toward him.

Almost imperceptibly he shook his head and passed on to the stairway. Perhaps Senhor Rodrigo had seen even that gesture, for his black eyes gleamed with angry suspicion. She turned back to the rail, shaken herself with her own helplessness to understand or aid.

Again she met the younger man's eyes, for he turned deliberately on the little platform at the head of the stairway to look back at her. In them she read as clearly as if he had shouted to her in English a warning that their affairs were not hers. Then he turned and ran down the steps to the launch.

Stretched out once more in her deck chair, she could think of nothing but the old man's face, that deliberate warning in the secretary's.

III

DURING THE NEXT FOUR DAYS, with the bay on B Deck all her own, Penelope's misgivings vanished. The two empty chairs facing her became merely two empty chairs.

Nothing to trouble her seriously had happened so far. There was, of course, her repeated experience of returning to her cabin to find this or that out of place. But nothing had been taken. And both stewardess and cabin boy had assured her everything she found amiss could have resulted from the motion of the ship.

Now less than four days remained. But she continued to wear the scarf about her rolled-up bob.

Abruptly the rosy pictures imagination was painting came to an end. Dr. Rosario and Rodrigo were returning to their chairs as if they had never left them!

The voyage, Penelope noted when her surprise at finding them still aboard passed, had been working miracles for the old man, too. He appeared younger, stronger. Though he now carried a smart, slender black cane with a heavy gold head, he walked almost jauntily to his chair, dropped into it with an exclamation of satisfaction. Almost immediately the eyes beneath the bushy gray brows turned on her with interest and appreciation.

This sea change in Dr. Rosario was not entirely for the better, she thought, amused. What magic could Barbados possess to have caused it? But the half-smile that curved her lips vanished when her eyes met those of the secretary. His plunged into hers like strokes of icy steel. If he had rendered her presence before, he was hostile now. And something else. . . .

She was more disturbed by Dr. Rosario's voice, deeper and harsher now, and his frequent and throaty laughter. That is, she was until she saw they disturbed Senhor Rodrigo even more. His role from now on, she observed, not without satisfaction, was infinitely minor. Dr. Rosario would do the talking; he, the listening.

Their whole manner of life aboard ship had changed, she was soon to learn. Until that night at dinner they had had their meals served in their stateroom. Now they shared a small table at one side of the dining salon but not the bottle of wine the old man insisted on ordering for each meal. Formerly they had always arrived on deck and left together. Now Dr. Rosario was apt to appear anywhere

at any time, and Senhor Rodrigo seemed incessantly in pursuit of him.

With little else to occupy her—and because she knew it enraged the secretary—Penelope watched the metamorphosis with curiosity and amusement. Not until the ship was passing under the nose of Sugar Loaf Mountain into Guanabara Bay did she understand it.

Passengers crowded the rails to watch the unfolding panorama of the harbor of Rio de Janeiro. The soft blue satin waters were dotted with ships and freighters, ferries and launches, sails of red or white on fishing boats or pleasure craft. Round the harbor rolled forest-deep mountains with the city of Rio winding in and out and up them.

From the staterooms cabin boys were bringing out hand luggage to pile in miscellaneous mounds against A-Deck walls. As a raucous voice rose in anger behind her Penelope swung round from the rail. A steward apparently had passed too close to Dr. Rosario. Perhaps jostled him with one of the bags jutting out beneath both arms.

The old man, livid with rage, cane lifted, stood ready to strike. Senhor Rodrigo had jumped in front of him, holding back the raised arm while he motioned the startled and resentful boy away.

"It is nothing, really," a woman's voice near Penelope said. "The voyage has been too long for Dr. Rosario. He is becoming old, like a child."

But Dr. Rosario was not becoming old, like a child! Where had her eyes and wits been? Penelope wondered. The gentle Dr. Rosario she had watched during those first four days of the voyage had had no tones in his low voice to produce these bass bellows. Nor could that frail old man have had either the will or the strength to strike another.

Somewhere two men had changed roles! Where? Barbados? Why? Who was this stranger? And where was the original Dr. Rosario?

Her face alight with understanding and mistrust, Penelope stood motionless, studying the old man, so like, yet so unlike, she saw clearly now, the first Dr. Rosario.

Black eyes thrusting into hers jerked her back to awareness. This time there was more than animosity in Rodrigo's gaze.

And she understood, too, what had puzzled her before, his reason for watching her so intently. He had been afraid she would discover the secret of that exchange!

A steward passed along the deck, urging everyone toward the main lounge where immigration and health officials waited to check passports and credentials. Penny turned away with relief. But as she slipped into the line forming outside the lounge she knew that even before she set foot in Brazil she had made a vindictive enemy.

EAGERLY as the ship warped nearer and nearer its berth Penny scanned the motley of faces below—white, brown, black, and every shade between. Nowhere could she find Paul or Eleanor.

Then her hand flew up, stopped midway, dropped to her side. Almost directly beneath her a great black cart-wheel of a hat had tilted up. For a moment Penelope gazed down into the dark eyes of Eleanor Oliver.

Penelope pressed toward the gangplank. One of the first ashore, she stepped into a milling mass of blue-clad porters, Brazilians, Americans, every nationality, crowding forward, waving, calling greetings. Clapping her purse tightly with one hand, keeping a firm grip on her brightly wound turban with the other, she wriggled and pushed a way through the mob.

Eleanor's arm went round her, drawing her aside. Eleanor's head bent to kiss her cheek. The wide hat, brushing her shoulder, hid both their faces. But Eleanor did not kiss her or offer a word of welcome.

"Have you got it?" she murmured and, when Penelope nodded: "On you? Here?"

Penelope nodded again. Eleanor stepped back. "Good. Let's get out of this. Quickly."

Guiding Penelope across the dock to a platform that ran before what appeared to be miles of warehouses, she added hurriedly, "I'll tell you later, darling, how thrilled I am to see you."

Her hand tightened; dropped from Penelope's arm. She turned to say brightly, "Oh, hello, Cock. Meeting friends, too?"

Penelope looked up to see a large man whose China-blue eyes in a broad, smooth, pinkish face flickered with annoyance. But

he answered easily enough, "No. Saw your car outside and thought Paul might be here." His voice rose in a question.

"Paul? Leave the Fabrica in midafternoon?" Eleanor smiled and shook her head. "Sorry, Penny, our secret is out. This is Mr. Emmett Cochrane, president of the U.E. in Brazil. Cock, this is the Penny you've heard—"

"Penny? Of India? And you wanted to keep her a secret?" The blue eyes beamed on them both, though the beam for Penny was not entirely paternal. "You're just what the doctor ordered, my dear. Pretty young things are rare in these parts—"

"Penny is an exclusive import for the Casa Grande," Eleanor interrupted. "And it's almost four, Cock. We've got to go through customs—"

"Think nothing of it and run along," Mr. Cochrane's expansive gesture dismissed the idea as a trifle. "Our wonder man, Goncalves, is here. He'll see to everything. Just give me your keys, Penny."

As she dug them from her purse and placed them in his hand Penelope was struck again with his impatience at meeting Eleanor there. And Eleanor, too, she knew, though no expression or inflection betrayed it, was on tenterhook to get away.

The keys in his hand, Mr. Cochrane lingered, however, to say, "I must see Paul, Eleanor. Something has just come up. I'll run out later, tell him. And I'll bring Penny's bags with me. If she has a trunk our first truck in the morning can take it out—if that's all right."

"Of course. And thanks awfully, Cock. We'll be on our way then." Eleanor hesitated, added more cordially, "If you're free, why not bring Madge with you and stay for dinner?"

"A big reward for a small favor. We'll be there. *Até logo.*"

Mr. Cochrane hurried away. Eleanor again turned Penelope toward the steps of the platform. At their top Penny lingered to glance back over the colorful dock. Mr. Cochrane, she noticed, appeared in no great haste now. He was strolling toward a high-piled truck.

As she watched two men moved out from its sheltering shade and fell into step

behind him with an almost military precision. Dr. Rosario and the secretary!

Silently Penny accompanied Eleanor along the platform into a huge building, through a series of interlocking foyers to a portico overlooking a great square lined with cars and taxis. Stret cars, buses, automobiles, pedestrians flowed in an unbroken stream down one side.

"My car's over here." Eleanor led the way. "Hop in and don't talk until I'm out of this traffic."

She swung the car round the square into the avenue and out of it into a narrower, roughly cobbled street that followed the water front. Penny held her breath as they dodged trucks and cars, finally leaned back and closed her eyes.

What had happened to Eleanor? This cool woman manipulating the car so expertly was almost a stranger. Certainly the little clay elephant had real significance for her. Or had there been bad news about Jay? That steeled expression on Eleanor's usually serene face could only be the result of shock or effort to control some deep emotion.

As the car swerved suddenly Penny looked up to see that they were turning into a wide, short avenue lined with government buildings of some kind. At its head rose a massive gateway, the gates swung wide.

She sat up quickly. "Don't tell me you live behind those imposing—"

"Hardly. Brazilian emperors once lived here. Look back, Penny. Is anyone behind us?"

"Not a soul," Penny reported.

Eleanor swept the car through the gates into an immense park, green and still and empty. Rolling little hills, covered with soft grass, and a meandering stream, all shaded by great spreading trees, formed an oasis after the noisy tumult of the city.

"Good." Eleanor brought the car to a stop on a paved road, her eyes anxious. She glanced at a tiny diamond wrist watch with alarm. "Quick. Where is it, Penny?"

"You want it here?" Penelope looked from Eleanor to the long stretch of deserted green.

"Yes, here. Quickly. I'll explain later. We've only a minute or two now."

In answer Penny unwrapped her turban, shook free her shoulder bob. As it

fell, she caught the little elephant wrapped in soft silk.

Eleanor seized it, her anxious eyes lighting. "Darling, how marvelous. In your hair! I've been wretched—thought it was in your purse."

She thrust it under a fold of her skirt between them and sent the car forward swiftly. "Here we go. Keep cool, no matter what happens."

IV

AS they moved down a dim, tree-arched parkway Penny gazed about apprehensively. Except for a car coming toward them out of a distant tunnel of trees there was not a sign of human—even animal—life anywhere. And Eleanor driving slowly with one hand while she fumbled at her hat with the other, said no more.

Suddenly, though not a breath of air stirred the leaves, the hat swirled out the window almost under the wheels of the approaching car. A moment more and it was tumbling over and over down a grassy bank to a tiny valley.

Eleanor stepped on the brake hastily, brought her car to a stop as the other drew alongside. A chauffeur sprang out, ran round his car and down the bank. An older man descended also, hat in hand and smiling, to step across the intervening space to Eleanor.

"Mrs. Oliver!" His voice was deep and pleasant. "At last the natural laws have caught up with those hats of yours. But do not worry. Guilherme will retrieve this one for you."

His hand entered the window beside Eleanor, took hers, and held it for a moment.

"Dr. Attilio! You won't tell Paul, will you? He loathes that cartwheel." Eleanor laughed and turned to Penny. "This is our good friend, Dr. Attilio de Sousa, director of the glass factory at Fabrica da Luz. And Paul's right hand. Miss Penelope Paget, the missing member of our family, Dr. Attilio." Eleanor's voice was smooth, but to Penny not quite smooth enough.

"Welcome to Rio, Miss Paget." Dr. Attilio's fine dark eyes smiled at her across the wheel, but obviously his mind was not

on her. "You arrive at the very best moment—the opening of our winter season. Ah!" He turned as the chauffeur came up with the hat, took it and presented it to Eleanor with a bow. "Here is the flying chapeau."

He held it like a tray, but Eleanor did not take it at once. Penny felt her hand on the seat between them, saw a flash of the little silken bundle as Eleanor's hand moved under the hat and lifted it by the crown. For a moment she held it that way, then quickly tossed it into the back of the car. What became of the little elephant Penelope was not quick enough to see, but she knew from the change in Eleanor it was no longer with them.

Both Eleanor's voice and smile were almost gay with relief as she turned again to Dr. Attilio. "You are the second man to do me a kind deed this afternoon. Mr. Cochrane was the first. As a reward I invited him and his wife to dinner. Can I persuade you and Dona Margherita to join us also?"

"You know you have only to suggest, Dona Eleanor. We will be there." Dr. Attilio pressed her hand again, bowed to Penelope, and stepped back.

Penny's eyes admired the tall impressive figure he made against the green. Eleanor, reading her thought, smiled. "He is handsome, isn't he? And truly a *grande senhor*."

"Well, I must say, Eleanor," Penny retorted, "I never expected you to give that little elephant to the first man we met. You never even looked at it."

Eleanor drove a moment in silence, then stopped the car. "What little elephant, darling? What are you talking about?"

Penelope gasped, "Don't you even know what it was?"

"What what was?" Eleanor's voice was cool and level, too smooth now. She turned and looked Penelope straight in the eyes. "My hat fell off and Dr. Attilio's chauffeur rescued it for me. Is that so remarkable?"

Penny tried unsuccessfully to pierce the enameled smile in Eleanor's eyes. She hesitated, said abruptly, "Perhaps not. But isn't it remarkable for you to dispose of something Jay—Jay and I have had some difficulty getting to you?"

A shadow moved across Eleanor's face.

Her hand on the wheel tightened. "Jay is in Portugal, Penny. Waiting for a plane for Rio."

"Jay is in New York, Eleanor. Or—was. You must know that."

For a moment Eleanor appeared on the verge of becoming the Eleanor of India. Then her face closed and she said crisply, "We'll play it my way, Penny, if you don't mind."

Anger flared in Penelope. "I think I do mind, Eleanor."

No answer. To Penny's amazement two great tears welled in the brown eyes.

"Eleanor! Darling! What is it? It—it's awful to find you like this—" Penny's own eyes misted.

"I was afraid I'd do that," Eleanor dashed the tears away. "Stop torturing me, Penny. I'm suffering enough."

"Torturing you! Are you completely mad?"

"Sometimes I think I am—or will be. Darling, don't ask questions. Don't mention—Jay. Paul received your cable. Or someone's. It just said you were on the verge of a breakdown, needed a rest—were coming to us." Eleanor gripped Penny's hand, pressed it hard. "Let it be that way, Penny."

She turned away, fighting visibly to regain her composure.

"I—I can't go on," she said more calmly after a moment. "I can't, Penny, if—I have to think about what I've done. Talk about it. It's all sealed over inside me. And I've got to keep it that way. Now it's over. My part. Oh, believe me, dear, I did it for Paul—for all of us. But if I—if anything happens to Jay—"

She sent the car leaping ahead and shortly through another great pair of gates out into another busy street. Penelope, flung back in her seat, remained that way, silent, bewildered, increasingly troubled.

FROM the paved highway they turned into a graveled road, passed a ragged line of small boxlike houses sprawled all over with vivid flowering vines, then turned left. Shortly Eleanor was stopping the car before another pair of gates, closed this time. They sealed solid concrete walls, high but made still higher with rows of barbed wire.

From a white gatehouse just inside a

short, dark-skinned man ran out, smiling and bowing, to unlock and swing back the gates. The car shot through, turned left on a paved driveway circling a hill that rose straight from the level ground.

For an instant on the right Penny glimpsed above massed trees the tiled roofs of factory buildings and a soaring chimney. Then on the hilltop above, a long, low house, guarded by three towering royal palms.

Again and sharply Eleanor turned right, sending the car roaring straight up the face of the hill on a white graveled road. Overhead interlaced branches of jack trees formed a dark green vault.

"*A casa é sua*—the house is yours, as Brazilians tell their guests." Eleanor smiled. "And it's true for you, Penny. Our house is yours for as long as you'll stay with us, dearest."

Penny glanced at her, startled. Eleanor was smiling as they ran through still another iron gateway, wide open this time at the top of the hill. Smiling as they circled a driveway round the huge rectangular house. Smiling when she stopped the car with a flourish before a wide veranda at the side.

"Here we are, Paul," she announced gaily. "Come, see what I've brought you."

Penny took a moment to look across green lawns, broken by beds of roses and aged, wide-spreading trees to a high green hedge circling everywhere. Then she turned, smiling, too, to see Paul's tall, thin figure running down the veranda steps. The same skinny Paul, she thought affectionately, with the same quick ways, the same big, kindly features and serious steel-gray eyes.

In an instant he was beside the car, kissing his wife, then racing round to draw her out and kiss her soundly, too. She saw then that this was not quite the same Paul. Older in years, yes. That was natural. But older, too, and troubled in spirit. Although he smiled at her she felt he was more anxious than glad to see her.

"This is Penny Paget," he was saying to someone. "Next to Eleanor the passion of my life."

A quiet, brown-haired, brown-eyed man, a little more than medium height, watching from behind the broad railing of the porch, came forward. But Paul, an arm about

both Eleanor and Penny, rushed them across the tiled floor into the house.

"Not that it matters," the stranger murmured to Penny as he followed them in, "but I'm Wythe Sloane."

"Matters!" Paul whirled them round. "Penny, this is Dr. Wythe W. Sloane, director of laboratories for Fabrica da Luz—light factory, to you. A very important gentleman, I assure you. Treat him well, for he can poison or blow us all to bits at a moment's notice."

"He only says that to annoy because he knows it eases." Wythe assured Penny amiably. "All he gives me to work with is a little sand occasionally."

"Find some sherry for Penny, dear. And go lightly on that whisky. That is, until later." Eleanor dropped down on a divan and took the glass Wythe had mixed for her. "Cock and Madge are coming for dinner. Oh, and Dr. Attilio and Dona Margherita, too, I think. You'll stay, of course, Wythe?"

Paul, on his way to the dining room, stopped short. Penny saw disappointment flash in his face. Eleanor saw it, too, and smiled at Wythe.

"You'll have to do a good deed to qualify, I'm afraid. There is a sort of reward-of-virtue dinner. Cock rescued us from customs, and Dr. Attilio saved my hat from a sad fate. That is, his chauffeur did."

"My good deed will be to swallow the regrets I was about to offer," Wythe told her. "Delfina likes a balanced table, and I'll make a nice sixth or eighth."

"Why not tenth—if we have to have any of you?" Paul demanded, returning with sherry. "Mart does a good deed hourly on the hour, and his mother is a good deed in herself."

"Ten's too many for Delfina to handle alone," Eleanor protested, "and it's too late to borrow Amelia."

"Ten is not too many, senhora," a flat voice announced from the dining-room doorway. "And Amelia is here."

"See? I told you," Paul declared. "Mamãe thinks of everyone else first. She knew you'd need Amelia."

Penny's astonished eyes met suddenly an enormous pair of black ones set in a dark brown face, one of the most sensible faces she had seen in years. It belonged to a

short, compact woman in a white uniform, her bare feet thrust into a pair of heelless strapped sandals.

"Delfina's learned to be prepared," Wythe explained to Penny, sitting down beside her. "She's the world's best cook. You'll be lucky to have a meal alone in this house. We flock in from miles around."

"Come in, Delfina," Eleanor invited. "Here is our longlost Penny. And, Penny, this is Delfina—"

"—our general manager and very good friend," chimed Paul and Wythe in unison, parroting, evidently, some phrase of Eleanor's.

"Miss Penny," the maid said clearly. She looked at the newcomer as if cataloguing her for all time but reserving judgment till later.

"Eight, then, Delfina," Eleanor instructed, rising, and moved toward an arched foyer where a telephone stood on a wall table. "And about eight, too, if you can manage. I'll call Mart to come up and bring his mother for coffee afterward," she added to Paul.

Paul sat still, staring into his glass as he slowly swirled the ice about in it. Then he looked up and smiled at Penny.

"Welcome to Fabrica da Luz, my dear. We've missed you. With Jay in England it's been very quiet here. Too quiet."

V

AS she drew an informal dinner dress and accessories from one of the bags the Cochranes brought out with them Penelope registered an impression that Brazilian customs officials were both thorough and untidy. But she was too upset to care.

Why hadn't she had the forethought to ask for a tray in bed? It had been difficult enough to adjust to the new Eleanor, but it was worse to see this new Paul. In India he had had the intense free spirit of the eternally young in mind. Here his high spirits were as false as Eleanor's calm.

She tried to shake off her milling thoughts as she bathed and dressed hurriedly. Perhaps she could have a minute alone with Paul before the others arrived. There had been no opportunity before the

Cochranes came, and almost immediately Mr. Cochrane had carried Paul away.

Wythe Sloane had been left in the living room to entertain Madge Cochrane, a small woman so faded and self-conscious that Penny felt sorry for her. She seemed afraid to utter the most casual remark lest it annoy her husband. And Mr. Cochrane seemed to have one ear permanently pinned back for the purpose of suppressing the feeble things she did say.

Or were they feeble? She had asked Eleanor when Jay was expected. And asked Wythe if he still hated living in Brazil. Both questions had been unfortunate. But whether they were the fruit of curiosity or interest or stemmed from some deeper purpose, Penny couldn't tell.

Well, Wythe was real enough, though very quiet. He had the palish look and restrained manner of the indoor intellectual worker, but he was not unsocial. His pleasant, courteous manner and easy way of coming to the rescue at difficult moments must make him quite an asset in mixed groups. No wonder Eleanor liked him, and Madge Cochrane, too.

In the living room everyone was sipping cocktails, waiting for her. Dr. Attilio rose cordially to greet her and to lead her over to meet his wife, Dona Margherita. A tall, stunning creature, with fine black eyes and gleaming black hair like her husband's, she was the first woman Penny had seen who could wear diamonds well. That was fortunate, for they glittered on her ears, fingers, and wrists. She smiled politely at Penny but said nothing, because, Dr. Attilio explained, she did not speak English perfectly so would not speak it at all.

Penny was struck by the change in Dr. Attilio, more so when she saw that others were noticing him, too. If he had been a grande senhor that afternoon, he was now a grande senhor who had just achieved some great victory or triumph. He spoke seldom and with dignity, but some inner glow radiated from him. Was he under the influence of the little elephant? She wondered.

When she turned from him she felt other eyes studying her, looking from her to Dr. Attilio speculatively. Paul's, Wythe's, Mr. Cochrane's.

Eleanor rose quickly, Madge Cochrane's hand in hers, to lead the way to the dining

room. There she seemed to solve some detail of procedure by magic.

"We'll place Dona Margherita on Paul's right, Madge, and Wythe on her right, so they can talk Portuguese. You sit on my left and Dr. Attilio on my right. That will put Cock on Paul's left and Penny between him and Dr. Attilio. That way we'll have no shoptalk."

"If I just mention that Mario Soares has returned," Mr. Cochrane asked when they were seated, "will that be shoptalk?"

"Lord, no!" Paul exclaimed. "Mario's out of the Fabrica for good. Mart's a better superintendent than a dozen Marios—"

"Good expresses my views in one word," Dr. Attilio added.

"But not Wythe's," Madge Cochrane's pale blue eyes were fixed on the chemist.

When Wythe protested it made no difference to him who was superintendent so long as his laboratories were not disturbed, Paul laughed and quoted a couplet from Rupert Brooke:

*"And in that Heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish."*

Mr. Cochrane blinked, "I don't get it, Paul."

"Very simple, really," Paul assured him. "Superintendents of grounds measuring in acres and tons and chemists counting little drops of water, little grains of sand, play hell with one another."

"At least chemists don't steal lamps," Cock declared. "Now that we know Mario must have been the ringleader in that lamp racket we should dig up proof against him before he disappears again—"

"Why throw good money after bad?" Paul asked. "Mario's out. The thefts have stopped. I'm for taking the loss and calling it a day."

"And as I told you before dinner, I don't agree," Cock argued. "If you let Mario go unpunished someone else may be inspired to steal—"

"I'm inspired to put you both on bread and water," Eleanor interrupted. "One more word about the Fabrica and I will."

"And I'll serve it to them for you with pleasure." Dr. Attilio smiled. "These Americans— To eat, drink, and sleep with their work! That is to shorten life."

"What is the Brazilian way?" asked Penny.

"To consider one's work but a part of life. It has many others—one's home, family, friends, books, amusements, interest—"

"You can say that, Dr. Attilio," Wythe commented lightly, "because work, for you, comes under the head of amusement or interests."

"Before Paul thinks of another poet to quote, I'll second Wythe," Mr. Cochrane broke in. "You Brazilians with a big family fortune behind you can lean back at the end of a day and forget your work. Because you know you can take it or leave it alone. We simple Americans—"

Dr. Attilio's white teeth flashed. "Many of you simple Americans have all you need—and more—but don't know it. What it amounts to really is that you all want more than you have. Not only that, but more than the Joneses have. That is your great vice as a people. At the same time your great virtue—"

THE talk rolled smoothly like a well-worn record, and Penny was grateful for it. She could listen politely while she marveled at Dona Margherita's diamonds. Or rather at the fact that she wore them as unconcernedly as an American woman would don costume jewelry.

Remembering the lovely little diamond watch on Eleanor's wrist, Penny looked at Mrs. Cochrane's and found another equally brilliant there. In fact, Dr. Attilio wore a large diamond set deep in a heavy ring. So did Mr. Cochrane. Only Paul, Wythe, and herself lacked a glittering stone somewhere.

She was recalled from her survey of the diamond situation by a growing sense that she was the focus of more than Madge Cochrane's eyes. Paul, she knew, was studying her. She had a physical sensation of the tentacles of his mind trying to enter hers. Wythe's eyes passed over her, returned, appraising, measuring her. And whenever Delfina entered the room Penny felt her great sober eyes. Evidently she met the maid's somewhat stringent demands, for with an ice she received a shy, fleeting smile.

"That makes your welcome unanimous, angel," Eleanor assured her when Delfina

had gone. "If Delfina disapproved of you I'm afraid we'd have to send you back on the first boat. She runs us all like good clocks. Even Baroneza. In honor of your arrival she washed the hussy this morning, but she got herself so dirty that she shut her up till tomorrow for her sins."

"Some of those shes have a capital S," Wythe interpreted when Penny looked slightly dizzy. "The capital S. She is a little white dog whose approval you must win also. She's the Baroness in more than name."

"Dear me," Penny sighed. "Life in Rio must be very complicated."

"Not so much so as in New York," Paul told her quickly. "The usual standards of decency are all one needs in Brazil. It's only when foreigners use one standard of good faith among themselves, another with Brazilians, that life can become very complicated indeed."

He smiled at her, then round the table. Penny, startled, saw that no one else smiled with him. Mr. Cochrane's face had flushed pinker still. Eleanor's appeared to have paled under her rouge. Not even Wythe broke the silence. Grasping at the first straw, Penny turned to Dr. Attilio.

"I wish I could speak Portuguese to tell your wife how much I admire her diamonds. I've never seen anything so gorgeous as those bracelets."

Dr. Attilio looked pleased. "I will tell her for you with much pleasure. We are very proud of our Brazilian diamonds."

"Brazilian?"

"But, of course. You do not know that Brazil is one of the leading diamond producers in the world? You do not know of the great Vargas diamond at this moment in New York? From its 726 carats one of the largest jewels in all history could be cut—but won't be. Who could buy it?"

He laughed at her confusion. "Do not be embarrassed. When foreigners think of Brazil they think of coffee. Well, in proportion, diamonds here are as plentiful as coffee beans." He turned to speak to his wife in Portuguese.

For a moment Dona Margherita's eyes rested on Penny austere; then she slipped off her bracelets and passed them across the table. Penny turned them gingerly in her hands, gazing in wonder at their intricate and delicate design. Suddenly,

aware that silence was again deep around her, she gave them to Dr. Attilio.

"They are exquisite, but return them to your wife quickly. Before anything happens."

Dr. Attilio spun them on his fingers to catch fire from the candle flames. "You like diamonds? Good. You must let me—Dona Eleanor must take you one day to see our diamond shops."

"And Dr. Attilio must tell you some of his wonder tales about diamonds." Eleanor rose, nodding to Paul. "Let's have coffee around the fire."

"You will be here some time?" Dr. Attilio asked Penny as they moved toward the living room. He skilfully turned her toward two deep chairs some distance from the fireplace.

"Thank you, Dr. Attilio," Penny sighed as she sank into one.

"You sigh? You are very tired? That is why you come to Rio?"

She sat very still, keeping a smile on her lips. Did he think it a coincidence that she and the elephant had arrived on the same day, met him in that park in the same car?

"Good," he was saying. "This is the very place. And time, too. Our winters—ah, they are delightful." He paused as Delfina arrived beside them with tiny cups of Brazilian coffee. "Here you will be able to sun by day and read by that fire at night. You enjoy to read?"

"I've almost forgotten how to read for pleasure."

"Then you will permit my life and me to place our library at your disposal? We have many English books." His voice dropped. "And you—you did not bring books with you?"

"None of interest to you, I'm afraid, Dr. Attilio. Just light novels, mysteries, the sort of thing friends give as bon voyage presents."

"I may see them—now—tonight?" His voice was lower still.

"Of course. But not tonight. They are coming out in the morning on a truck with my trunk, Mr. Cochrane says."

Across his eyes flashed such concern that Penelope turned her head to see if something were amiss behind her. Only Paul was there, coming toward them with a tray of highballs and liqueurs.

THE sound of a car stopping at the veranda interrupted them. Paul gave the tray to Mr. Cochrane and turned for the door, saying, "Remind me to get a butler in the morning."

Obviously the newcomers were a welcome addition. The mother, a short, round little Brazilian woman with a fluff of snow-white hair and another pair of the most enormous and dark, shining eyes. And Mart, a tall, lean, hard-boiled young man with hair like fire. Everyone addressed the mother as *mamãe*, the son as Mart. If they had other names, Penny did not hear them.

Paul brought the young man to her. "This is Mart, Penny, our superintendent of grounds. Look him over and tell me if he's meant for better things." He patted Mart on the shoulder. "Penny has—or had—an infallible intuition about people." With an odd glance for her he turned to retrieve his tray.

Dr. Attilio rose. "Take my chair, Mart. I have already monopolized the *senhorita* too long. But save your intuition, Miss Penny. I will give Mart my personal recommendation any day."

Again Mr. Cochrane appeared unexpectedly. "How you *Fabrica* men stand together! I wish we had the same spirit in the town offices. It's dog eat dog there."

He walked away with Dr. Attilio, and Mart settled leisurely into the chair beside Penny. "And the answer to that," he informed her as he folded, "is that Paul runs the factories. He, the town offices." His long lips twisted cynically. "He'd have us all at one another's throats if he could. Thinks it makes for the competitive spirit. Bigger and better production."

Leaning back in his chair, he surveyed Penny critically. "Not bad. Not bad at all." He lifted his glass to her and smiled. "That's my American blood coming out in me. Want a sample of how my Brazilian side would phrase it?"

"Some other time, if you don't mind. I must do a little homework on the proper responses. Besides, I find no fault with the American way."

"So! Running up the Stars and Stripes on me in the first round! Your intuition must be overrated. I'm a Brazilian and proud of it."

Penny waved her handkerchief feebly. "Peace, brother. I'm just a little stranger in this home."

His hard hand just touched hers, but she felt as if her bones had crumbled. "Americans like our esteemed *presidente* Cochrane get under my skin. I make it a rule to shoot first even when their eyes are a lovely silver gray. Going to be with us long?"

"You can change that record, too." Penny sat up, feeling sprightly for the first time since she arrived. "Everyone asks me that. What's the matter? Don't you welcome little strangers?"

"Speaking for myself no. Especially young femmes. Too much fag combing them out of the hairs."

She looked pointedly at his blazing thatch. "Dead or alive?"

His shouts of laughter startled the room. Dona Margherita's eyes smoldered with distaste. His mother shook her head at him, but the others waited expectantly.

Mart waved a nonchalant hand. "Purely local humor." Then he looked about the room anxiously. "Did we miss anything by not being invited to dinner?"

"Mart!" His mother smiled an apology at Penny. "The poor boy thinks he's giving an imitation of an American—"

An unexpected voice answered Mart. "Penny introduced a new topic," Madge Cochrane said. "Diamonds."

Penny looked about the suddenly silent room in astonishment. Only Eleanor retained the power to move and speak. Her eyes on the toe of a gently swaying slipper, she suggested, "Tell one of your diamond tales now, Dr. Attilio. A dark and chilly night, friends about a fire—the perfect setting."

A feeling of helpless resentment touched Penelope. That meeting with Dr. Attilio in the park was no accident. Perhaps this dinner hadn't been as impromptu as it appeared, either. And now she felt she was being used again to further some purpose or previous arrangement of Eleanor's.

But Dr. Attilio was taking it all very naturally, making the usual courteous deprecations. "Miss Penny has given me the perfect opportunity," he admitted finally, "to tell you a story I want you all to know."

"THE beginning," he said, "dates back fifty years before my family entered the story a century ago. At that time diamonds were pouring out of the mines of central Brazil in what appeared to be an inexhaustible stream. No accurate figures exist as to their quantity, but it is known that during one period of less than thirty years more than a million and a half stones were mined. And shipped across the seas to Portugal. Every stone had to be sent to Lisbon and every stone of twenty or more carats automatically became the property of the King.

"Naturally that resulted in a great deal of contraband—what you call bootlegging in the States. Miners who found particularly fine or large diamonds frequently hid them, hoping to retrieve them later when conditions might have changed. Penalties for hoarding and bootlegging were very severe. Guilty miners, if caught, were exiled to Africa and all they owned confiscated.

"One day—about 1796—two simple miners named João and José, and that's almost all that is known of them, found a stone so large they could not believe it was a diamond. But if it were, they had no intention of letting it fall into the hands of others. Yet neither trusted the other to guard it. So they made a pact to remain together day and night. Each one, I believe—though this is pure legend—was to possess the stone on alternate days. At any rate, their inseparability raised suspicion. One morning both were found dead. Murdered."

Dr. Attilio turned to look at Penelope.

"Don't stop," she urged. "If it continues like that you should sell your story to Hollywood."

"It does continue like that," he assured her gravely. "The man who stole their diamond was a Portuguese named Antonio. He belonged to the Regiment of King's Dragoons stationed in the mines to maintain order and to spy. Antonio also could not believe a diamond could be so large. He made the mistake of asking someone's opinion. He, too, was found dead. And so the stone went from hand to hand until whenever a man was found mysteriously

murdered it was whispered that the great diamond had been in his hands.

"The stone even acquired a name—Satan's Sixth Finger. There is a superstition among the simple people of my country—of many countries—that the devil has six fingers. Anyone unfortunate enough to be born with six fingers is considered to be in league with the devil and doomed to lead a most unhappy life. To-day modern medicine saves many victims by removing the extra digit when the child is born. But in remote regions owners of six fingers are still suspected of being Satan's emissaries.

"Sometimes Satan's Sixth Finger would disappear from sight for a year or more. Then the discovery of another murder victim would revive the rumor that the stone was again in circulation. Finally the fact of its existence became generally accepted, though no one would credit the tales told of it, for it was said to be as long and wide as a hen's egg and more than half as thick. Incredible!"

Dr. Attilio paused to sip his drink. No one spoke. His glance went round the room to Paul and, still looking at Paul, he took up the story again:

"One hundred years ago this house in which we are sitting tonight had already for many years been the Casa Grande of my great-great-grandfather's fazenda here. Today Dona Eleanor's skill has made it a *placete* of only six or seven rooms. But in those times, Brazilian families being notably large, it included twenty or more small ones.

"My great-great—he was the Barão de Avila to be brief, I'll call him Baron. A very rich and powerful man, and a *hidalgo* of the empire of Brazil, as those remaining royal palms beside the Casa gates testify, he had twelve children, three of them sons. Of the three, the oldest was his only child by his first wife, a beautiful young woman he had loved passionately. Everything he had, everything he did, he had and did for the sake of that oldest son. Romerão. This gave no pleasure, it may be imagined, to his remaining sons nor to their mother.

"Romerão was proud—as all my family are. And adventurous—as many of us today are not." Dr. Attilio smiled deprecatingly and turned his eyes from Paul.

"Some times the young man would dis-

appear for weeks, but he always returned. And sometimes the information he brought his father was extremely useful—either for Baron Avila's economic interests or for his political role at court.

"One night the baron had a dream which caused him to leap from his bed. In it he had heard the voice of Romerão calling him. Romerão had been away longer than usual, and Baron Avila was tremendously worried for his safety. So now he roused the house and sent his other sons with slaves to look for him. And in a passion of anxiety himself, he set off down the back of this hill toward a road that used to run through a small but deep ravine.

"That ravine was filled and level when the U.E. bought this property. The glass and lamp factories stand on it now. But a century ago it was deep and narrow and dark. In it the baron found Romerão. The young man was dying. He had been stabbed in the back."

Someone sighed. Someone jerked a chair. But no one turned his gaze from Dr. Attilio's strained and intent face.

"Baron Avila called no one, not even a priest. He remained through the night beside his son until the boy was dead. Then he carried Romerão up the hill in his own arms to this house. After Romerão was buried the baron shut himself up in a room for days, hardly eating or sleeping. When at last he appeared he seemed on the verge of death himself.

"But he did not die—then. On the first ship to leave Rio he sailed for Europe. He was gone some time. No one knew why he went or where or what he did abroad. No one ever knew so long as he lived." Dr. Attilio paused and smiled round the silent circle. "That is the end of the beginning."

"There is more?" Wythe Sloane asked.

"Of course." Dr. Attilio glanced at his wife. "But perhaps I have already talked too long—"

"No point in cutting off a dog's tail by inches," Mart drawled. He grinned at Penny. "Inherited that pretty thought from my Texas father."

Slowly, carefully, as if choosing each word, Dr. Attilio went on.

don. It enclosed a sealed letter written by Baron Avila just a century ago. I'll spare you details of how it came to me except to say that I am a direct descendant of the son born to Romerão's young wife after his death. That letter told me the story I have just told you. And it told me much more. It told me the baron had received from Romerão in that dark ravine Satan's Sixth Finger."

Again that sigh. Some movement. But Penny could not turn her fascinated eyes from Dr. Attilio's face to see.

"In that letter Baron Avila also told of his intention to end the evil of the diamond by hiding it away for a century. And he told where the stone was and how to get it."

A tremor of cold ran over Penny. Her eyes felt stiff from gazing at Dr. Attilio. Around her some stifling emotion seemed to be rising from the room. Why didn't someone speak? Break the tension?

Again Mart came to the rescue. "You found it?"

Dr. Attilio raised a hand dramatically. "The date to find it is still to come."

Tautness went out of Penny as relief poured over her. How ridiculous to have supposed that silly little clay elephant could have concealed the great stone—that for almost three weeks she had sheltered in her own hair Satan's Sixth Finger.

She looked up to find Dr. Attilio watching her anxiously.

"You do not enjoy such tales? When you are so very tired I was unwise to begin so long a story—"

"Unwise to tell it at all, in my opinion," Mr. Cochrane declared. "Do you realize what a plague your life will be, Dr. Attilio, if this story gets about? Why, you might even be in danger someone—"

"—might try to kill me for the information?" the Brazilian finished for him. "Someone who desired the diamond for himself?"

"Well, something like that," Mr. Cochrane was embarrassed. He looked around, "I suggest that each of us here solemnly promise not to repeat or write or in any way communicate to anyone else this fascinating but very dangerous story of Dr. Attilio's."

"But I want you to repeat it," Dr. Attilio protested. "That is why I am telling it. I want you to repeat it as often as you

"**A**BOUT a year ago I received a letter from the Bank of England in Lon-

like. When I have finished telling it all, of course."

"There is more?" Penny cried. "Oh, don't spoil it, Dr. Attilio. It's perfect as it is."

"I must tell it. Fortunately the end is brief. Perhaps Baron Avila left other letters with the Bank of England. I do not know. But someone somewhere knows something of this tale. Perhaps talked unwisely. I have just received word that a kinsman of mine is—is mysteriously dead—in Barbados."

Barbados! That name clanged in Penny's ears. She hardly heard Dr. Attilio's next words.

"Perhaps he paid with his life for the folly of talking too much. Too soon. A terrible folly—for others may make the same mistake—may swallow the tale whole. As I did, at first.

"It isn't true?" Paul asked that. He was sitting beside his wife on the divan, his hand through her arm, closed about her wrist, hard. Eleanor leaned back against the couch, her eyes half closed, her face rigidly calm.

"The tale as a tale is authentic, yes. But the diamond may not exist."

DR. ATTILIO sat back, pleased at the effect of his statement. "Wait! Wait! Let me finish."

The rustling and talk ceased.

"I investigated. I wanted to know two things beyond all doubt. First, if such a diamond really existed. More importantly, if it had been given to Baron Avila by his dying son Romerão."

"And you found?" Wythe Sloane prompted.

"That if such a stone exists at all it never became the property of anyone in my family."

"How could you prove something like that which happened a century ago?" Mr. Cochrane demanded.

"The task was not too difficult. The women—some of the men, too—of my family have been faithful diary keepers. Family historians, we call them. And according to old diaries of the time of Romerão, his death was due to the very natural cause of having roused the jealousy of a lover for his lady. No one, but several diaries record that.

"They also record that the baron, brooding over the death of his oldest son day after day, without food or sleep, became from that time on the victim of hallucinations. He knew—as did everyone else—the old legend that death followed Satan's Sixth Finger from hand to hand. What more natural then that he should prefer to link the death of his best-loved son with a fabulous jewel rather than with a sordid affair over someone's mistress? Remember, we are a proud family."

"But that is merely assumption on your part," Mr. Cochrane protested, added hastily, "About the cause of Romerão's death, I mean."

"Wait. The instructions in the letter Baron Avila left to be delivered to the head of the family when the century had passed obviously reveal the invention of a deluded mind. You will have to take my word for that. But finally I must confess this: Crazed over the death of Romerão, Baron Avila took his own life. Shortly after he returned from Europe. That is an act the law of our church forbids. To a man of such piety as my ancestor, it would not have been possible had he been of sound mind."

Dr. Attilio rose, smiling apologetically. "I have taken too long with my story, and my wife is chiding me with her eyes. But you can understand why I am eager for you to tell it if the lives of innocent men are not to be endangered. I am sure you agree with me now, Mr. Cochrane?"

"I? Oh yes, yes indeed," Mr. Cochrane rose stiffly. "I should have waited until you finished your tale before offering advice." His voice was dry as he said good night to Dr. Attilio. Then, "Come Madge," he urged. "It's late. Can we take you in, Wythe?"

"Thanks. My car is waiting for me beside the laboratories." Wythe rose but made no move to go.

The Cochranes hurried away, and Mart's mother prepared to follow.

"How do you like the Rio brand of bedtime story?" Mart asked Penny as he waited for his mother. "Whew! With that deep voice of his, the doc had even my hair on end for a time!"

"Depends on how much of the yarn is true," Wythe said idly. "Come on, folks.

Can't you see the Olivers are dying to be alone at last with Penny?"

"How much is true?" Eleanor repeated. "Why not all of it?"

Wythe smiled. "My nose was in exceptional form tonight. If I ever smelled a herring that tale was one. But which was herring and whose trail it was meant to cross—" He shrugged. "Well, *até logo*. Don't let them keep you talking all night, Penny."

The smile vanished from Paul's tired face as he closed the door behind them. He walked straight to Penny and, lifting her out of her chair, demanded, "Now, then! What about Jay?"

BEHIND them a tray of glasses clattered in Eleanor's hand. "What about Jay, Paul? I told you Jay is—"

Paul did not turn his harassed eyes from Penny. "Believe Jay is in Europe if you wish, Eleanor. I know better. I knew something was on our Penny's mind when she did not leap out of the car to meet me. And I watched her eyes when I said Jay was in England. What happened, Penny? Where is Jay?"

Penelope stood miserably in his tight grasp, then admitted uncertainly, "He was in New York, Paul. I talked with him on the phone, saw him for a moment. But I don't know where he is now—"

Paul placed her back in her chair. "Now begin! Tell me everything you know."

For an hour he questioned her, going over and over her experience that Friday midnight in New York.

"But nothing's happened to Jay; can't you see that?" Eleanor insisted at intervals. "Penny wasn't herself that night. If Jay is in New York and she did see him in the subway—that doesn't mean he's ill now or—"

"Dead?" Paul's voice was bleak.

"He isn't dead! Don't say that. We—we would have heard. The New York offices"

Paul rose to pace the floor. "He may have known he was followed for some reason." He did not look at his wife. "He may have faked a faint to keep Penny out of trouble. He could have left the train at the next station."

"I'm sure that's what he did if—if it were really Jay she saw," Eleanor agreed.

"He would not have been able to reach her again that night, remember?"

"You're sure he made no effort to see you again?" Paul interrupted. "Think, Penny. You did not go back to your apartment. He could not reach you there or the *Chronicle*. But wasn't there anything in the papers? Couldn't he have learned you were in a hospital?"

Penelope stopped a shake of her head midway. "Some man did come to St. Simon's. It might have been Jay."

"Of course, it was Jay," Eleanor declared impatiently. "When he learned what had happened to you he would have been worried to death. How could he know when he telephoned you were on the verge of a breakdown?"

"Wait, Eleanor. What makes you think this man wasn't Jay, Penny?"

"I don't know. Something about the gesture this man made. I—I just saw his hand, really. And he gave my nurse money—I'm sure of that—to watch me and my mail. That didn't seem like Jay."

Eleanor laughed brittlely. "To buy you books or flowers, silly. He was probably so ashamed of himself for placing you there, he didn't want to face you." She rose. "Oh, go to bed, both of you. You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

"You could be right, Eleanor," Paul admitted. "But none of this explains why we haven't heard from Jay. Why didn't he take a plane down or come on the *Paraguay* with Penny?" He started to pace the floor again.

"Paul!" Eleanor stopped him, her hands on his shoulders, forcing him to look at her. "Don't—don't say any more. I—I didn't know you knew—where he was. I can't bear it, Paul. You think I sacrificed our son for—"

"For—"

"For a chance to have a home in our own country. For Jay and for you and me, Paul. You know how much he wants it. I do, too. He is an American boy. He wants American friends, American life. It's been so long, dear, and he's had so little of it. Every year you say, 'Two more years and we'll go home.' And we believed you and waited. But now we don't any more. You said it in Japan, and you said it in India, and now you're saying it here. But you know and we know that

the moment you've finished this plant you want to go on to the Argentine—"

"So you took this way to—to get money—for a home!" Paul's hands flashed up to close on hers and hold them tightly. "I didn't know you both wanted it—so much."

"And I couldn't know there was such danger, Paul. Jay is so intelligent and resourceful. And Cock—"

"Cock!" Paul released her, stepped back. "What about Cock?"

"He—he just made the arrangements for Jay to fly to Portugal and go on to London and back. Cock doesn't know why, Paul. He did it because I asked him."

"Someone knows. Someone talked. One man is dead in Barbados. And Jay—my son—"

Penny slipped away. Slipped away with an awful knowledge that Dr. Attilio's tale was true!

Jay must have gone to London to secure Satan's Sixth Finger for Dr. Attilio. Unable to return to Rio with it, he had sent it to her, then followed it to New York.

And she had brought it to Eleanor in that horrible little elephant. . . .

VII

A WARM and breathing weight on her stomach woke Penny. She blinked at sight of an enormous and spotless powder puff sitting upright to regard her with two bright eyes of its own.

"How do you do?" she asked.

A snowy paw came up, inviting itself to be shaken. Penelope shook it solemnly. The next moment she became a hillock over which the puff raced back and forth, emitting incessant, earsplitting barks.

"How do you do?" She tried again.

The fluff sat down and offered a snowy paw.

Many times in the days to come Penelope was to wish she could still the mystery and horror tightening around her with a "how-do-you-do." But at that moment she only knew she had fallen captive to the most ingratiating and tyrannical little dog in the world.

Suddenly the Baroneza dropped down beside her and closed her eyes in what appeared to be deep and prolonged sleep.

Looking around, Penny found Delfina standing in the doorway.

"Good morning," she cried. "Or is it morning?"

Delfina came slowly into the room, her face so dark and somber that Penelope sat up to look at her more closely.

"It's almost three, Miss Penny."

For the first time Penny became aware of the brilliant afternoon sunshine flooding her room and of the silence in all the home.

"Oh, why didn't someone wake me? And where is everyone?"

The maid's eyes shone unexpectedly with tears. "They're gone, Miss Penny. This morning." Fumbling in her pocket blindly, she drew out a letter. As Penny ripped it open Delfina picked up the Baroness and turned for the door. "I'll get you something to eat."

But she didn't move. Holding the wriggling Baroneza tightly, she watched Penny's eyes widen.

You must understand and forgive us, darling. Paul and I are taking the five-o'clock plane for New York. There was nothing you could do, so we didn't wake you. You're to stay right here and rest and sun and be well when we return. Delfina will see to that. And if you want amusement or advice or anything, go to Wythe Sloane. I'm leaving him a note to keep an eye on you. Heaps of thanks for coming, and don't worry. I know Jay is all right. But Paul insists on going, and, of course, I can't let him go alone. Heaps of love, too, angel. We'll be back the first possible moment—all three of us. ELEANOR.

And across the bottom of the page Paul had scrawled:

Sorry, Penny, but you know how I feel about Jay. Take it easy here and don't worry about us. The house is yours. If you get into mischief go to Mart. Till soon, my dear, P.

Penny dropped the letter to find Delfina waiting beside her.

"Oh, why didn't they wake me? What time did they go?"

"There was no time, Miss Penny. The plane left at daylight, and they had to go into Rio as soon as they could. They did not know if they could get places on the regular plane. But Mr. Paul said he would get a special one. He telephoned just

before five o'clock that they could go."

Penny threw back the covers and swung her feet to the floor. "I'm getting up, Delfina. How about some food on the veranda?"

To shake off the depression settling over her she sped to shower and dress in gray flannel slacks and shirt. At sight of them Delfina, sadly arranging a tray in the kitchen, lifted startled eyes.

"Don't worry," Penny assured her, misunderstanding. "Mrs. Oliver promised they would soon be back."

Delfina moistened her lips. "It's about Mr. Jay, isn't it? If he is in Portugal why do they go to New York? You bring bad news, Miss Penny?"

Penelope shook her head. "I guess you and I will just have to hold the fort until they return and tell us."

Delfina picked up Penny's tray and led the way to the veranda. And without a word Penny followed her. But when she was seated Delfina did not leave. Something else obviously weighed on her mind. "You brought something with you, Miss Penny?"

Penelope put down her melon spoon carefully. What now?

"Your trunk and books came out this morning. I unpacked them while you sleep. Your trunk, I mean. The books are on top of the wardrobe in your bathroom if you want them. But, Miss Penny, everything is tumbled and messy. Not like the senhora's trunks when she comes home. The customs must think you brought something—"

Penny's thoughts raced back to her tumbled bags of the night before. "Non-sense," she said with more assurance than she felt. "Friends packed for me and very quickly. I was sick, you know. And bag-gagemen simply throw trunks and bags around."

HALFHEARTEDLY she followed the whisking little dog about, stopping to glimpse in the distance everywhere blue mountains against a clear indigo sky.

The Casa Grande was truly a big house, she realized as they circled it, and colorful with its roof of crimson-toned tiles and sprays of crimson bougainvillea against creamy stucco walls. And roses, dahlias, and zinnias amazing in size and height.

Even violets, tucked away in the shade of the low building at the back that housed garage, laundries, and servants quarters, were three times the size of any she had ever seen before.

A fattish, slow-moving gardener clipping the hedge stopped to smile at her and to laugh at the Baroneza's stubborn efforts to find a point to wriggle through—though gates front and rear were wide open. Brushing aside some dry-rustling dark leaves, Penny saw in the intricately interlaced and ironlike branches that the little dog was as helpless as before a concrete wall.

Temporarily convinced herself, the Baroneza led Penny to the tall Casa gates. Penny caught her breath as she looked beyond the Fabrica walls to a wide green valley ruffled with little hills and, farther still, to the crests of the Organ Mountains. Above her soared the three royal palms, their restless fronds brushing the sky. But their noble grace reminded her of Dr. Attilio and his story, and she turned from them quickly to explore with her eyes the forbidden land beyond the gates.

To the right of the driveway an old orange-and-grapefruit orchard covered the slope. To the left spread vegetable gardens, so extensive they were evidently the source of supply of the Fabrica's restaurants.

The U.E. plant, she discovered, could only be seen from the rear gates, from which another road led down a more gradually graded slope to wide green lawns. Beyond them the red tiled roofs of factories, warehouses, and other buildings spread about the foot of the hill.

Delfina came to shepherd Penny and the Baroneza round the house to the veranda. The maid hesitated, then asked: "Will it be all right if I go to my sister's? When the senhora does not need me I go see her."

"Of course. If no one comes. I can't speak Portuguese, you know."

"I will come back by eight and you will be all right here. The gardener and chauffeur are gone now. By six everyone will go except the watchmen at the north gate and two firemen that stay in the glass factory all the night."

"The north gate? Is that the main en-

trance—where the gatehouse is?”

“The only one. And no one can come in there, even the workers, without a card of *identidade*. Everyone else must wait till the gateman telephones for permission to let them in. No one will come up here, Miss Penny.”

Her voice came to Penelope from far away. Sleep was claiming her again.

WHEN she opened her eyes Delfina was still beside her, still talking. But the sky was deepening to black, and darkness clung about the veranda.

“Wake up, Miss Penny. See, you have slept four hours and will be cold. I was afraid when I came back and saw the Casa dark.”

“I’ll take the Baroneza for a walk. It’s all right to go now, isn’t it?”

Delfina looked at her for the first time with approval. “Then senhora always walks an hour about the pavement when she is home. But you cannot stay out that long, Miss Penny. The clouds are heavy. Rain is coming soon. What are you looking for?”

“The Baroness.” Penny turned at some startled sound. “What’s the matter?”

“The Baroneza was shut up in my room, Miss Penny. I—I heard her there when I came in. I fed her, and she is sleeping there now.”

“Shut up in your room?”

Delfina nodded, her eyes intent. “She did not bother you? You did not put her there?”

“Of course not. I was asleep before you left the veranda.” Penelope turned uneasily toward the doors. “Do you think we—we’d better look in the house? That someone has been here?”

Delfina laughed unexpectedly. “Mr. Mart! That’s who it was. I saw him running down the back road to his shops when I came. He must have come up here and the Baroneza tried to follow him. *Pobrezinha!* She is lonely for the senhora.”

Penny said hastily, “If it’s going to rain I’d better start. I’ll get a jacket.”

Delfina followed her inside, turning on lights, closing window draperies, finally accompanied her to the rear gates with final instructions.

“I will lock these gates now, Miss Penny.

Will you come up the driveway and through the Casa gates? You have only to pull up little blocks at the bottom, and shut them hard. They lock themselves. Good night, and don’t be afraid if you hear a whistle in the night. It is only a watchman. One goes round outside the hedge every hour.”

Smiling to herself, Penny set off down the back road to the brightly lighted pavement that ran round the hill. Delfina was definitely taking her in charge. And more than the Baroneza was lonely for the senhora. All that about locked gates and watchmen sounded as if Delfina were whistling to keep her courage up. Wasted breath, she thought, amused. Mart evidently had the situation well in hand!

When she reached the pavement and saw the high wall, its top glistening with broken glass in addition to the tiers of barbed wire, her sense of superiority over Delfina increased.

“The place is a fortress. If only Andrea and Pepperpot could view me now. Miles of private park to walk in while they, poor city sparrows, are lucky to see a tree.”

For an hour she rambled back and forth on the pavement, enjoying the cool night air, the crowded stars in one section of the sky while all the rest was ebony black, the exotic patterns thrown by swaying branches of flamboyant and mango trees on the concrete and against the cream walls of the buildings.

When at last she approached the north gate on her way round to the Casa driveway the gateman came out of the gatehouse to smile a *boa noite*. Then he pointed to the sky, turned up the collar of his dark cape, and hurried back a few steps. Taking the hint, she started at a brisker pace for the Casa.

Not until she left the pavement for the tunnel of the jack trees did she realize how dark the night had become and how close the rain. Before she had climbed many feet the first drops were pushing through the thick leaves to plop on the gravel.

Once or twice she paused, breathless with the climb, to feel them on her flushed face. Then as the rain fell more heavily she stopped no more.

Her heart was pounding with the exertion, her knees trembling when she

reached the Casa gates. One already was closed. Shielding her face and holding the collar of her jacket together with her left hand, she stooped to release the bolt at the base of the other with her right.

Her hand never touched the gate or found the bolt. Her fingers remained rigid in mid-air where some nervous reaction had jerked them.

The drumming of the rain fell round her unnoticed. What she had heard, clearly and unmistakably, was the crackle of the hedge as something thrust against it sharply. What she felt was a cold chill of menace as tangible as the rain in the air.

She knew that crackle. Only a few hours before she had heard it over and over as the Baroneza tried to push a way through the twined and heavily leaved branches.

The Baroneza certainly was not outside those Casa gates in this rain. But something or someone was certainly standing or moving along the hedge on the low bank just above her! What, she did not wait to learn.

REACHING the house was like running over quicksand in a nightmare. Her feet slipped on the wet gravel, slipped on the wet grass as she ran across it to the front door, remembered it was locked, and swerved round to the side veranda.

Light shining through the draperies gave her courage. She raced up the steps—to fall headlong on the cold smooth tiles!

For the space of a breath she lay motionless while her heart tried to tear itself loose from her breast. For the first time in her life she knew terror. A heart-choking, breath-stopping terror. Then she sprang to her feet and whirled round.

Something darker than the darkness sprawled across that upper step. And across her terrified mind flashed again the sensation her hand had known as she fell. Of something sharp. Of something warm and stickily wet. Of some heavy, unresponsive softish mass.

She tore her eyes from that dark shape and fled for the doors. But she could not rip from her mind the knowledge that what she had touched was the lifeless body of a man.

He had slipped and struck his head on the hard tiles, she tried to tell herself as she fumbled at the doors, was unconscious, needed help. But once inside, memory of that rough and jagged bone that had pierced her hand, now stained with streaks of red, told her he was dead.

Doors locked and bolted behind her, she knew she was safe from whatever horror lurked outside. They were almost impregnable. The windows were decoratively but no less effectively barred and, in addition, screened.

They could not, however, shut out the terror that had come in with her. Nor her abysmal feeling of helplessness as she sped across the bright living room to the kitchen to scrub frantically at her hand.

She could think of no one to whom to turn for help. Delfina might be a tower of strength by day, but she was emotional and superstitious. If waked now to learn that a dead man lay on the Casa steps she might walk out, have hysterics, or both.

Wythe Sloane lived somewhere in Rio, ten or fifteen miles away at least. Mart? He and his mother lived near the factory, but she had no idea where, nor even what their surname was to call them. The Cochranes lived near Wythe, somewhere on a mountain.

She had no Portuguese to call the gatehouse of the police. And neither course seemed wise. The night gateman might be capable of handling the gate competently, but that, she feared, was the only egg in his basket. Certainly, either for her own sake or Paul's, it would be a mistake to become involved with the Brazilian police.

With relief she remembered the night watchmen. One of them circled the hedge every hour, Delfina had said. Perhaps she thought wildly, a watchman was responsible for that man on the steps. Perhaps he had seen an intruder entering the Casa gates, struck him down, and gone for help.

Somehow she pushed herself out of the living room, through the foyer, into a reception hall with the proportions of Grand Central Station. And across it to the massive front door. From there she could watch the Casa gates, attract the watchman's attention. . . .

Propping her five feet three inches against it, she peered out through a high,

small pane. All she could see was rain driving through darkness.

Her fingers found switches in a row just inside the door. While she peered she pushed down quickly one key after the other.

Porch lights and garden lights and gate lights flooded on, revealing lawns and rosebeds and trunks of the royal palms. Revealing, too, that one half of the gate was still closed—that the other half was slowly closing.

Some hand, invisible to her, must have released the bolt and thrust the gate forward. Must have released it but an instant before she pressed down the switches.

The watchman! But before the thought was finished she knew it was not the watchman. Blurred by the rain though still penetrating, his whistle sounded. It was coming up the back road to the rear gates.

For a moment her body went limp against the door, then stiffened. That sharp rustle of the hedge again crackled like thunder in her ears. Something—no, someone!—had stood there above her—frightened her—frightened her deliberately so that she would not close the gate.

Cold with a thought—an explanation—for that rustle, she turned round. A moment later she was in the living room, a reluctant finger hovering over the inside switch that controlled the veranda lights.

Decisively she pressed it and, slipping aside the drapery of a window, looked across the veranda to the steps.

She saw nothing but red tiles shining with moisture and rain falling in a heavy cleansing torrent.

VIII

WHEN Penelope arrived in the sunny kitchen the next morning Delfina gave her a most disapproving look. In fact, two of them. One was because the hands of the clock indicated eleven. Delfina went to bed at eight and rose at five, she said, her strong face shining with the abominable virtue of the early and industrious riser.

The other was for her appearance. "The more you sleep, the worse you look, Miss Penny," she declared flatly.

As she went through the motions of eating the breakfast Delfina felt was good

for her Penelope found it difficult to believe anything could have happened there. She tried to ask questions that would not break too incongruously into the scene. Had Delfina heard her come in last night? Had she heard her—and by that she meant anyone—fall on the veranda steps? Indeed Delfina had not. She went to bed to sleep. And did.

Was there really only one entrance to the Fabrica da Luz? Did the employees who lived in clusters of tiny houses she had noticed south of the property have to walk all the way round to the north gate?

Yes, they did, Delfina said shortly. That walk, morning and evening, was good for them—kept them from becoming fat and lazy.

"There is another gate, but it's private," she added.

Mr. Mart lived in the superintendent of ground's house, the last of a row of houses just outside the west wall. For his convenience a small iron gate had been cut through the Fabrica wall between his back garden and the factory grounds to give him immediate access if necessary. But he alone had the key to that little gate. And night and day three vicious dogs ranged between his locked front gate and that back one.

"But Mr. Mart is fiercer than one dog added to the other. No one would dare go in there, not even Mr. Paul, unless Mr. Mart went too." Delfina turned a startled eye on Penny. "Why?"

"Nothing," Penny assured her hastily. "Just listening to the rain last night, I wondered."

No, Delfina was not the one to confide in. Remained Wythe and Mart. Eleanor had recommended Wythe; Paul, Mart. But she did not feel up to facing Mart's derisive eyes and laughter. Wythe's quiet, understanding manner was infinitely preferable at a time like this.

"I've put the rug Dona Eleanor uses out by the Casa gates this morning," Delfina broke in. "But don't stay long, Miss Penny. It's almost noon and the sun's like fire."

Inwardly Penny groaned as she realized she must postpone her call on Dr. Sloane until after his luncheon hour. To fail to take a sun bath would merely set off more questions or protests from Delfina.

The rug was spread on the grass just off the driveway between the royal palms and the Casa. The Baroneza rushed wildly round it, then off to poke her nose into more hopeful spots in the hedge.

But Penny took no pleasure in the sunshine or in the lustrous crowns of palm fronds down which the sunlight slipped to sparkle like golden dew on each tip. All she could see were the Casa gates on one side, the veranda steps on the other. All she could think of were those gates and steps in darkness and rain.

She dropped down on the rug and slipped off her robe. The Baroneza, taking that as a signal she would be there some time, promptly curled up in the shade of a basket-sculptured shrub and went to sleep.

Penny could not relax with her. Wasn't it curious, she asked herself, that the Baroneza's busy nose had found no new scent as she romped about?

She sat up, then jumped up. A thought almost worse than the night's experience shot her through and through with apprehension. Could her wretched nerves have been playing tricks with her? Had she imagined that menacing rustle? That crumpled body? Those streaks of blood she had scouted from her hand?

The veranda steps were dry and spotless. The driveway from steps to gate had no answer. Through white gravel the red soil shone pink and clean except where shadows of mango trees spread changing patterns.

The Casa gates, swung back and fastened by their little wooden blocks, looked just as usual. The hedge, straight and smartly clipped, the firm path beneath damp leaves—to her inexperienced eyes, at least—gave no sign that anyone *had* stood there.

Seizing a short stick, she jumped down again and poked along the edge of the driveway between the Casa gates and veranda steps. She turned over leaves, thrust twigs and small pebbles out of the way. Nothing.

And then—just beside the steps—she saw in a dip in the earth where rain still stood a glint of metal, only a tiny glint, but something. With her stick she tipped it out of its pool of the drive and examined it. Picked it up and looked again.

No such piece had ever come her way before. It had no practical purpose or value. It was not decorative enough to be

worn as an ornament. But though she did not know what it might mean to anyone else, it was a heaven-sent sign to her.

On her hand lay a tiny metal cylinder of gold and silver. Not more than an inch long, it was carefully molded into a right arm and hand. The silver hand was doubled into a fist. The gold arm swelled out to just below the elbow, where it was cut off and sealed with gold.

A chain of four minute gold links clung to a loop set in the smooth top. The last of the four links that had been twisted or broken open.

WITH the little arm in her handkerchief Penelope arrived at the brown varnished doors of the laboratories shortly after two o'clock. At her knock a pleasant Brazilian girl opened them to her, and she stepped immediately into an office. Wythe Sloane, sitting at the desk there, quickly rose to greet her.

As she watched him approach, smiling, her heart sank. Perhaps she should have gone to Mart after all. This man looked so remote from contact with life beyond that quiet laboratory. How could he possibly understand what she had come to say?

She began clearly enough the story of her experience. But though his eyes retained their friendly interest, behind their surface, she could feel as she went on, he was analyzing her and her words. What was more, he was doubting them.

She hesitated, fumbled, repeated herself for emphasis, finally stopped when she saw one eyebrow lift as she told of the Casa gate closing of itself.

"You say this man was dead?" he asked after a moment. "How do you know? Perhaps, as you yourself thought at first, he had fallen and struck his head. Those tiles are hard as iron, you know. He may have recovered between the time you left him and returned to look out the window."

"He was dead. I know it. He couldn't have been alive. His head—the blood—" She could not describe what she had felt rather than seen.

"A little bit of blood can seem like an awful lot to a young woman on a dark and stormy night." When she remained silent he added, "Could you see what he

looked like? How he was dressed? How large a man he was?"

Apparently these were serious questions, but she felt he was giving little attention to the answers. His attention was on her, not her words.

"It was dark—pouring rain—I couldn't really see. He wasn't a big man—at least he didn't seem big—"

"And the watchman didn't notice anything? Let's say you arrived back at the Casa about ten and were in the house when the watchman made his ten-o'clock round. That means he must have passed the Casa gates at least eight times before six o'clock this morning. He never stopped at all?"

"No."

Wythe picked up a chunk of rough glass from his desk and tumbled it back and forth in his hands, watching light from the high windows above him play over it. When he looked up his eyes were less skeptical, more concerned.

"Will you take some advice from me?"

He must have seen her strong inward reservation, for he did not begin with advice. "I know what you're going through," he said slowly. "I had a breakdown myself—several years ago. I know what nerves can do, what strange ideas they can put in your head. . . ."

"These aren't strange ideas," she interrupted. "I tell you I saw that man. I touched him. His—his blood was on my hand. Are you forgetting that someone else was there, too—waiting beside the hedge? I'm positive he frightened me so I wouldn't shut that gate."

She jumped up and turned for the doors. Words were futile before the skepticism in his face, his whole manner now.

He moved to the door with her and put out his hand. "Please don't go away feeling as you do. I do understand. And don't wander around the grounds after dark, though there is no danger, of course. It is impossible for anyone to enter. Wait a moment."

Picking up a desk phone, he dialed quickly. "Mart?" he asked after a moment. "Did the gate sheet record anyone entering the north gate last night? No? Were any accidents reported—a watchman or fireman injured?"

He replaced the receiver before he turned again to Penny. "No one entered the

grounds last night after six o'clock. All the men who remained inside are intact. The gateman records the time each person arrives and leaves. You say you saw this man on the veranda steps about ten o'clock. If he came in before six the gateman would have notified the watchmen he had not been checked out. In four hours they could have found him a dozen times."

The telephone rang as he spoke. Before he lifted the receiver he stopped at Penny's chair to pick up something. She moved quickly and took the little gold-and-silver arm from his hand.

When he finished the call she held it out to him. "There. I found that beside the veranda steps."

Wythe turned it over in his hand, then smiled. "Don't you know what it is? It's a *figa*—a lucky charm—called the Protecting Arm or something like that. You'll see many of them when you begin to go about. Huge ones hanging in the doorways of small shops. Tiny ones like this about the necks and wrists of children. It protects Brazilians from the evil eye. Anyone might have lost this yesterday or a year ago. Though this is the first one I've seen in gold and silver. Usually they're made of *guiné* wood."

Not too politely Penny took it from him. "Then I'll keep it. I can use a little protection."

"Don't say that," he protested. "Perhaps you need amusement more than protection. Rio has beautiful scenic highways, and I have a car—"

"Thank you. I have the Olivers' car and José."

"What about movies? Rio has many of them, and good ones. And night clubs. Though you shouldn't go—"

"Yes, I should go," she interrupted, impatient to get away. "Good-by and thank you so much for listening."

"Let's say até logo." He smiled at her through the closing door. "That means 'till soon.'"

"Self-centered idiot!" Penny hurried down the short path from his door to the pavement. "He didn't do a thing. Well, that's the last of him."

But he had done for her the one thing she needed most. His lack of belief had convinced her more than his credulity might have done of the reality of her ex-

perience. And he had made her so angry, she felt more energetic than she had for weeks. He would amuse her, would he? Tell her what she should and should not do!

She stopped to slip the little arm for safekeeping on the bar of her scarfpin and replace it securely. "Hereafter I'll depend on myself and amuse myself. And I'll start right now."

A few more determined steps and she stopped again. What could she do? Where could she go? The thought of returning to the Casa to be reminded on every hand of the night before was intolerable. She must get away from it, see other people, other scenes. But where? There was only Rio, and she couldn't go there.

Why not? She demanded obstinately of herself. She had traveled over India when five years younger than she was now. In some cities she had known no one, nor could she speak any of the various languages of the country.

Her hand closed about some coins in her pocket. She drew them out. Brazilian milreis she had received in change on the *Paraguay*! Surely they were a sign she should begin now, as she had said, to depend on herself and amuse herself.

Without pausing to return to the Casa to tell Delfina she was going, she hurried to the north gate.

IX

GOING to Rio—without a motorcar—was a simple but lengthy undertaking. Penny crossed the railway spur just beyond the factory wall, waved on by a fat signalman squeezed into a tiny shelter and urgent nods from an almost naked urchin who a moment later hurtled past her as if his scanty garment were on fire.

A right turn onto the gravel road, a five minutes' walk under the bright scrutiny of women and children in the boxlike houses brought her to the tracks of the main line. The crossing gates were closed. Above, in a tower, a signalman jumped from lever to lever like a caged canary among its perches.

Minutes passed. Two or three soldiers went round the gates and on. Penelope waited with the gathering cars, trucks, and oxcarts.

Free at last to cross, she made her way through small boys flying kites, groups of soldiers off duty, and gnarled cluster of dogs to the junction with the main highway.

Two methods of transportation offered—an open streetcar and an airtight bus. She chose the streetcar.

Her enthusiasm and energy for the venture were beginning to wane. Though only a handful of passengers were scattered among the seats that ran from side to side of the car, those few took a detailed interest in everything about her.

One young man in a crumpled linen suit and heavy black fedora had rushed up, pulling on a jacket as he ran. Seating himself in front of her on the other side of the car, he eyed her with the shiny glance of the professional lady's man.

Absorbed shortly in the changing sights of the narrow, cobbled streets, she did not notice that the young man in the fedora had slid nearer. Only when she tired of a street of shops whose doorways were almost impassable with shoes or garlic suspended on cords did she become conscious of his eyes. They were fastened on her scarfpin. She smiled to herself. The pin was large and impressive but of no value really.

The car stopped. The motorman descended to release the trolley. As other passengers scrambled off the conductor's hands invited her to do the same or return with the car. Rested now, she descended and, following the majority of passengers, found herself shortly on Rio's most famous street, the Avenida Rio Branco.

A hundred feet wide, its broad sidewalks laid in black-and-white mosaics, it was faced on both sides by stone buildings. Wide lanes, separated by aisles of banyan trees, roared with traffic.

Far ahead against the familiar outline of Sugar Loaf Mountain an obelisk, marking the end of the avenue, challenged her. But she never reached it. Interesting as the mosaic sidewalks were to the eyes, they were something else to the feet.

The appearance of sidewalk cafés was a welcome sight. Selecting an advantageous table in the inside corner of one of them, she dropped into a prickly wicker chair. "Lemonade," she said to a waiter. "*Limonada*," he corrected with great expertness

and disappeared into the café behind her.

Sipping her chaste drink, she lingered while the daily promenade of smart and not so smart men and women passed and repassed. The personnel at the small tables changed, but the glint of diamonds on hands and wrists, ears, frocks, hats, and shirt fronts remained constant. Dr. Attilio was right, she agreed. Diamonds in Brazil were almost as numerous as coffee beans.

Her spirits rose as she found interest and amusement in everything. But fell with a crash when she looked up to find a dapper young man approaching her table. Senhor Rodrigo!

Before she could rise he had swung an empty chair round from a neighboring table and seated himself in it. As he fixed his black eyes on her, her fingers sought the Brazilian coins in her pocket and her eyes a waiter, any waiter.

"Do not be disturbed, Miss Paget," he said in very good English. "I only wish to speak with the *senhorita* for one minute."

"Certainly not." She tried to rise.

"See, you cannot leave until I leave also, Miss Paget. And that will be when you consent to talk with me here—or elsewhere."

Penelope looked around. Across the high railing on her left, separating her from the next café, no one was even looking in her direction. On the sidewalk the promenaders appeared completely immersed in their own affairs. Besides, they were all Brazilians—might not speak English. If only someone with an English or American face would come along!

She saw with dismay that the street lamps were flashing on, that her corner was now dim and secluded. Even if someone did come could she be seen?

Senhor Rodrigo, watching, smiled. "It is difficult, is it not? But I merely wish to ask two little questions."

Penny, gazing over his head, smiled too. Mart's unmistakable red head—hatless and rumpled—had appeared for a moment above the strollers approaching. She sat forward, waiting.

But as he came opposite his name died on her lips. His eyes met hers directly, passed over her without a sign of recognition. The next moment he was gone.

Really alarmed now, she sat quiet. On

Rio's main avenue, crowded with people, surely it was impossible for Senhor Rodrigo to isolate and detain her. With relief she remembered Delfina. If she didn't return soon Delfina might send José to look for her!

Paper rustled on the table before her. She looked down to see the flimsy of a wireless in Senhor Rodrigo's outstretched hand.

"Read it, please," he was saying. "You cannot, perhaps? Then I will read it for you. It was sent by Dr. Rosario to a kinsman in Rio the afternoon our ship reached Barbados."

Kinsman! Barbados! The two words clicked together in Penelope's mind. Dr. Rosario had left the *SS Paraguay* at Barbados and never returned. Dr. Attilio had said a kinsman of his had been found mysteriously dead in Barbados. Could Dr. Rosario be the kinsman?

"Miss Paget, you will listen, please? The wireless reads: 'In case my arrival delayed see passenger Penelope Paget destination Rio concerning Fouché.'"

Penelope scarcely heard the words. She was seeing again the gentle Dr. Rosario escaping hurriedly from her cabin. Could it have been the diamond he was seeking? Could Fouché be his code word for it? Could it have been the diamond—the Fouché—that others, Senhor Rodrigo and the false Dr. Rosario, had been seeking those days when she found her cabin disturbed? Had they killed that kind old man when he failed and undertaken the search themselves?

She looked back at Senhor Rodrigo as coldly as he had ever looked at her. And now he dared to come to her openly to ask about that diamond!

"You will tell me what you know about Fouché?" His voice was low but insistent. "It is necessary, Miss Paget. A man's life depends on my knowing. It is already late——"

"Too late!"

The words burst from Penny's lips against her will. She shrank back in her chair, aghast at her foolhardiness. Aghast, too, at the certainty in her mind that Dr. Rosario—the real Dr. Rosario—was dead. She had only suspected until she met Senhor Rodrigo's eyes just now. Now she knew!

And he knew that she knew. He had leaned forward, his black eyes narrowed and icy on hers. "Too late?" he was repeating softly. "What are you saying, Miss Paget?"

PENELOPE bent her head and twisted the broken straws about her glass with shaking fingers. Her mind was frozen before the arctic menace she felt in his.

"Miss Paget!"

Another voice—a brisk, authoritative voice—was speaking her name. She looked up to see another slender, dark man, hat in hand, smiling at her over Senhor Rodrigo's head. As she gazed at him with mingled misgiving and hope he turned to speak rapidly yet courteously to Senhor Rodrigo, then look about for an empty chair.

Senhor Rodrigo rose slowly, gesturing to his own as he replied in Portuguese. He turned then to smile with his lips at Penelope. "Até logo, Miss Paget, I look forward to seeing you again."

"How delightful to find you here," the newcomer was saying. "I have only now learned you are in Rio." As Senhor Rodrigo still lingered in the entrance to the café he dropped into the vacated chair to ask, "What are you drinking? Limonada? You will have one with me?"

Penny shook her head, her eyes wary. When Senhor Rodrigo had gone she asked, "Who—who are you?"

Her new companion smiled. "In your country you have a flattering word for men like me. Intelligence! And am I not of the intelligence? I pass this café, observe your predicament, and arrive to do the necessary."

"You are a detective?"

"If you like. But your friend has gone. Come, my car is just at the corner. I must take you home."

"No, no," she protested, alarmed again. "If you really want to help me, please telephone my house. The chauffeur will come in for me."

"That would be delightful if hours were days. But I can have you at the Fabrica gates before he could possibly arrive here. Come, Miss Paget."

He stood up, and she had to rise too. There was no mistaking the authority in his voice and manner. He paid her check and led her silently to his car. As silently they

sped down the Avenida. Stiff with uneasiness, she sat upright until familiar landmarks convinced her he was really taking her home.

"Ah, that is better." He gave her an amused smile. "A few minutes more and you will see the Fabrica wall. Let me advise you a little before I leave you. Quite innocently, I am sure, you have walked into a very complicated situation in Rio. Even dangerous for a young woman here alone. It is most unfortunate that the Olivers—had to leave unexpectedly."

"What situation, Senhor——? I'm sorry, I do not know your name."

"Let us hope you never know it. If you will do as I suggest and remain within the Fabrica walls for a few days you may not need to. Or to know about—the situation, either. We hope to end it shortly. Then you will be quite free to go where you will."

He swung off the main highway onto the gravel road before he spoke again. "See? You are almost on your own doorstep. Can you trust me now to tell me what you know about Fouché?"

Startled, she shook her head. He smiled. "So that was what your friend on the Avenida wished to know also? Perhaps for the same reason."

"But I know no one named Fouché——"

"Naturally. I believe the gentleman referred to lived in the days of the French Revolution. Does that mean anything to you?"

She flushed a little. "Only that he was the sort of man to sit on both sides of the fence and in the middle——"

"A little knowledge is not enough, is it? A pity. But no matter. At the moment." He swung left and stopped the car before the north gate. "Here you are."

Penelope's eyes darkened with anger instead of gratitude. For the light above the gatehouse revealed Mart just inside the gates. He was talking to the little old Negro gateman.

Now he hurried forward as the gateman unlocked the gates, thrust them back. "Miss Paget! Fancy meeting you here! I thought you were sleeping the clock round in the Casa."

His glance went on to the detective, and they talked briefly in Portuguese. "Your friend has already devoted more time than

he had to spare to bring you here," he told Penny then. "So I have consented to see you safely home from this point."

Penny sprang to the ground, close to tears, as she felt rather than saw the amusement they were both enjoying at her expense. "Thank you," she tried to say with dignity. "It isn't necessary for either of you——"

Mart drew her aside as the detective's car backed and shot away. And he continued to stand, a restraining hand on her arm, as he looked after it, whistling under his breath. "Do you see what I see?"

Penny tried to draw away. "I don't believe I'm interested. Good night."

"Listen, my peppery little *Americana*!" Mart's long strides kept pace with her hurried steps. "You're in Brazil now, where men have a word or two to say. I'm taking you to your own door—not a step farther. And heaven help you if you don't stay there. While I'm at it, another word of courteous counsel. Keep away from that American smoothie, Wythe Sloane. If you must weep on someone's shoulder come to mine."

Penny jerked herself free. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I saw you when you left his office. An amateur April, that's what you were. Splashing all over the place!"

"That's not true. I mean, you couldn't have seen me. You were in your office. Wythe telephoned you there."

"You think I'm paralyzed? I galloped over pronto to see what roused that fellow's interest in the welfare of my employees. And what did I see? You!"

"Odd your eyes were so good then but couldn't see me on the avenue this afternoon!"

"This afternoon? On the Avenida? My little tiger lily. I'm a workingman."

SEIZING her arm, he rushed her up some rough earthen steps cut into the hill to a more or less flat plateau. Through the high dry grass that covered it various paths converged on the steps.

"I'll go ahead. Follow me."

Eager to reach the Casa, Penny did follow, running in her effort to keep up with him. Mart led her round by the watchman's path to the Casa gates and in to the veranda.

"Boa noite," he said politely. "And don't thank me. I'd do anything for Paul."

"Paul?"

"Paul. He gave me this job when Mario Soares left it between night and day some months ago, and I'm going to keep it. One way is to keep you out of trouble."

"Oh, stop talking nonsense," Penny cried, exasperated. "Did you know that man who brought me home?"

"Who? Me? Duchess, I have no social life whatever."

"Then why did you say, 'Do you see what I see?' when he backed his car out of the north gate?"

For once Mart appeared at a loss. Then he looked at her squarely. "I was just wondering who else was taking an interest in your reaching the Fabrica."

"Who else? You mean you were?"

He shouted with laughter. "What big ideas you have, grandma. No, what I saw was the glow of a cigarette in the darkness beside that railway-crossing shelter. It just occurred to me someone was interested Maybe not——"

Abruptly he was serious. "Penny, Paul's in a tight spot. And through no fault of his own. You've caused enough trouble, sending him off like that to New York. The least you can do is to keep out of Rio."

"Keep out of Rio?"

"Why not? All of us—Cock, Dr. Attilio, even your little Wythe—have all covered up for him. So you go to Rio alone. Mightn't that suggest to anyone interested that Paul and Eleanor are not here?"

"Don't be ridiculous! No one in Rio knows I exist."

"No? What made this Brazilian Gala-had tote you home? Now I'm going to tell you something and I mean it. Stay inside the Fabrica walls. Have anyone you like—or don't like, for that matter, meaning me—at the Casa. But don't go outside. *Claro*?"

"I assume you mean clear. Perfectly. Now what do I do? Send out balloons to drop messages asking someone to come in? If I stay here alone day and night I'll begin muttering to myself."

"Oh, good night!" Mart strode away.

For a moment Penny listened to his irritated footsteps on the graveled path round the house. Then reluctantly, dreading the long evening and night ahead, she

opened the doors and entered the living room.

are so kind telephon 29-0009 and so I come there.

Your friend,
MR. MUKERJI

WHILE she bathed and changed for dinner Delfina hovered close, concealing relief under irritation. "Where have you been, Miss Penny?" she demanded over and over. "I looked everywhere for you, and Dr. Wythe scolded me for letting you go out alone. He has telephoned many times since five o'clock."

"I've been to London to see the King." Penelope concealed her own irritation under flippancy. With Wythe, Mart, even this detective telling her what to do, she might as well be in New York with Andrea and Pepperpot.

"Brazil has a president," Delfina corrected her. "And you can't speak Portuguese. Why didn't you take José and the car? Dr. Wythe thought something had happened to you."

Penny was alarmed at the violence of her own reaction. It was a danger signal, she knew, warning her of nerves stretched to the breaking point. "Serve dinner," she said shortly. "I'll be there in a moment."

The food or wine or misgivings at the thought of facing the evening alone excited her still further. She kept Delfina beside her in the dining room, chattering to her feverishly. When the maid left the room without explanation Penny looked penitently at the Baroneza stretched out in the archway, even her bright eyes anxious.

"Don't mind me, Baroness. I guess I'm just tired or lonely or something. I never thought to hear myself saying this, but I'd give Satan's Sixth Finger if you could turn into Pepperpot for just an hour."

Delfina came in with a note the gate-man had sent up. "For you, Miss Penny," she said, turning it over uneasily. "But you don't know anyone in Rio."

"That's what you think!" Penelope muttered to herself as she took the cheap white envelope.

On the outside was written "Miss Pagee" and on equally cheap paper inside but in more literate handwriting:

By this you can see I KNow English but not good so it is a big pleasure to know you are come and perhaps to help me speak better. I could like to learn as I am Hindu and so enthuse I could come tonite. If you

Delfina's reaction was both definite and amusing. "Tear it up," she urged, her chin thrust out. "Tear it up, Miss Penny. Why does he want you to teach him? He can get many teachers in Rio."

"It might be interesting," Penelope teased. "I lived for a year in India, you know. Certainly it wouldn't be difficult."

"No, Miss Penny. If he comes he must come in the day. It is not right to see him at night. If he knows you are here he knows you are alone."

"Nonsense. He doesn't want to come to call. This is business in a way. And I know many people in India. He may be a friend of one of them."

"Mr. Paul and the senhora lived many years in India. He does not try to see them. Besides"—Delfina paused to marshal her big guns into action—"Dr. Wythe and Mr. Mart would not like it."

That changed the picture. Penny regarded the maid with serious eyes.

"Do you know what an issue is, Delfina? This is one. All day long people—Dr. Wythe, Mr. Mart, and—others—have been telling me what not to do. Perhaps I'm set in my ways. Perhaps I'm too accustomed to making decisions for myself and other people. And now here I am—in a strange country, among strangers—and with so many things happening. I mean everything is so different here," she corrected hastily.

"I'm growing confused, Delfina, and uncertain of myself. Yet with Mr. Paul and the senhora away, I must rely on myself. Don't you see? If I don't decide things for myself, even if I make mistakes, I'll just become more confused or uncertain—and I won't get better. I'll get worse."

"No, I don't see, Miss Penny," Delfina told her stoutly. "You can't make a mistake if you don't do anything. About that letter, I mean. You just don't like to have people tell you what to do. Nobody does. I do not like you to say, 'Delfina, serve dinner.'"

Penelope startled them both by laughing with pure pleasure.

Delfina's smile grew into a laugh, too.

Baroneza bounced up, plume waving, to rise on her hind legs and applaud with her front paws.

Delfina laughed again. "Now you must give her something to eat. She always does that when people laugh. Mr. Paul says she thinks they are admiring her."

When the Baroneza was rewarded tension was gone from the air and from Penny. The letter, forgotten for the moment, had lost its importance when she picked it up again.

"Do you know what I think, Delfina? I believe this 'Mr. Mukerji' is just a young boy. Probably feeling as strange and lonely here as I do. A man never would have signed a letter like that. He would have written out his full name. I've known a lot of Hindu boys—so simple and friendly and eager to learn. Why, it might be fun to have him here. Imagine teaching a young Hindu English in a South American country that speaks Portuguese."

You fraud, she scolded herself, you know you're afraid of being alone all evening. You're worse than a fraud. You're a fool. And a bully. But she could not control the perverse excitement that gripped her.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Delfina," she said finally. "We'll have him here and you can sit in the living room with us and hear all and see all. If he is not what I think he is I'll give you—what would you like of mine?"

The dark face became a battleground between disapproval and desire. Then a spark kindled in the large eyes. "Your black coat, Miss Penny."

"Done. Will you please call that number, Delfina? Tell Mr. Mukerji he can come from half-past eight to nine."

AT half-past eight exactly Mr. Mukerji arrived. A self-important little man whose strong black hair stood up in arches from its middle part, he was anything but the simple boy Penelope had visualized.

Behind large steel-rimmed glasses his eyes roamed constantly, and at times the narrow lobes of his ears twitched. Penny never did learn whether the sleeves of his sleazy, too-bright blue suit were too long or too short. His small, apparently boneless hands kept shooting in and out of his cuffs as he talked.

"Good night," he greeted Penelope, crossing the room to her and holding out his hand in a combination of cordiality and obsequiousness that cramped her anticipation then and there. "You are so kind to teach me. I am truly one good pupil. I know many English words to see in a book. I only don't talk them correct."

His accent was strange, unlike any Penny had heard in India. And he spoke very rapidly, his eyes searching her and the room and Delfina indiscriminately. He sat down in one of the big overstuffed chairs under a lamp but, when it almost swallowed him, moved forward hastily to perch on the edge.

"First we must talk the cost."

Conscious of Delfina sitting upright on a straight chair across the room in an attitude that at the same time achieved triumph and grim watchfulness, Penny's reply was prompt. "Oh, I don't know that I can teach you, Mr. Mukerji. I let you come tonight to find out."

"You think I am poor?" The small hands dug out a billfold. "See? I pay any cost."

"Suppose we try reading first," Penny suggested, determined that this was his first and last lesson. "That will give me an idea of your pronunciation and vocabulary."

A rack of Eleanor's household magazines stood beside her chair. She drew one out and offered it to him. He looked at the tanned body of a girl in a bathing suit extended in a dive through sky and sea across its cover.

"Excuse, but I am a man," he said finally, putting it on the floor. "I must read books—serious words. Politics, economics, history. You have?"

"How would this do?" Penny picked up the only one of her own books she had carried in her bags, *The All-American Front*.

"Ah," he murmured, rising to take it. "Good. You like such books? You have more?"

"Those I brought with me include a little of everything."

"How interest! I could see?" Again he was up, looking about.

"Not tonight. I haven't opened them—"

"You must!" he cried. Then at her surprise lowered his voice. "We starve in Rio

for books from your country. They are most difficult to have."

"We cannot get them," Delfina's flat voice declared with finality. "They are on a high shelf."

"But I am a man," he reminded them again. "I can——"

This was too much. "Not tonight." Penny's voice was crisp. "Will you begin to read?"

"Yes, yes." He subsided on his chair edge, opened the book.

He read well because he read slowly. Except for mistakes right and left with accents, he seemed to know, as he had said, many English words.

Penny relaxed little by little. While one part of her mind roused occasionally to correct Mukerji's pronunciation, another drifted away to thoughts of its own.

Why had Wythe Sloane called her several times? Been so concerned about her absence? Was it Wythe who had sent Mart to watch for her at the north gate? Or Delfina?

She smiled to herself at Mart's description of the chemist. In every way the two were antagonistic types. Remembering her own exasperation with Wythe that afternoon, she could appreciate his effect on the active, aggressive Mart. One thing she would not think about. Senhor Rodrigo and his low, chilled voice repeating, "Too late?"

Her ear suddenly called her back to focus on Mukerji's reading. "Please read that paragraph again," she suggested and, when his glance questioned her, added lamely, "You read very well. I'm afraid I was thinking of the context, not your pronunciation."

He read the paragraph again. Listening, Penelope forced herself to remain relaxed in her chair. This man was not in need of English instruction from her or anyone. He knew the meaning and pronunciation of every word he read. In the quiet he, too, had relaxed, mispronouncing a word one way one time, a different way when he met it again. Her ear had caught what her mind had missed.

Mukerji, also, she could see, was forcing himself to concentrate. Was he trying to remember how he had mispronounced these words originally? Was his spoken and written English all just one big pre-

tense, too? Why had he really come?

She caught her breath. Could he have some association with Rodrigo? What a fool she had been to allow pique against Wythe and Mart to override her judgment!

Five minutes to nine, said the clock above the fireplace. She listened a little longer, made careful corrections, then rose. Mukerji closed the book and lifted himself from his cramped position. Behind his glasses his eyes were winking rapidly.

"I am so thankful," he began. "I have learn——"

"You don't need to be," Penny assured him. "You do very well and should find a professional teacher to give you English grammar. I wouldn't know a participle if I saw one."

"But you are most good," he insisted, taking a few short steps across the floor. "I come tomorrow."

Delfina had risen too. Mukerji made no further move toward the door. Penelope's disturbed impression that he wasn't the fool he looked became definite. He expected to see someone or something here!

"We'll call this lesson a sample," she said, going to the doors and opening them wide, pointedly. "If I decide to continue I'll let you know. Good night."

He moved toward her slowly, Delfina now close on his heels, her mouth grim. At the doors he paused again, measuring them and the room.

Then unaccountably, at a sound on the veranda, he stepped outside and hurried away. Both Penny and Delfina peered out to see what had moved him when they could not.

Stretched out in a lounge chair, tapping his pipe on the metal rim of the ash tray, was Wythe Sloane.

HE greeted them, getting up. Delfina sniffed. "I was afraid to take my eyes off that fellow. He was scared of something too."

"Nonsense, Delfina," Penny protested. "Though he did come under false pretenses. What do you suppose he really wanted?"

"He wanted to go all round this house. Dr. Wythe, he tried to go into Miss Penny's room and get her books."

"He did spoil a good evening, didn't he?"

"Good night!" Delfina marched into the house.

Penny moved across the veranda to look out over the valley to the mountains, silent and dark except where fires burned like angry eyes high on their slopes. Wythe followed to stand beside her.

"What are you looking at so intently?"

"The fires. See? Four, five—at least six of them. Don't the Brazilians like their country?"

"Oh, they're just burning over dead grass and underbrush. One way to keep down mosquitoes and snakes. Thanks for reminding me. I must ask Mart to have the grass above the laboratories burned off Saturday. The mosquito men were fussing about it last week."

"Mosquito men!"

"Haven't you seen them? You will. They come round every week, looking for standing water and other mosquito breeding spots. To prevent malaria, yellow fever, and what not. Doing a good job too."

His casual tone changed. "I came up tonight for several reasons. We got off to a bad start this afternoon, didn't we?"

"It doesn't matter," Penny tried to say lightly. "Naturally you didn't believe me."

"I didn't believe you, I admit—then." Wythe stressed the word and paused. "But I'm beginning to change my mind."

Penny turned to look at him. His face in the dim light was tired and worried. "Why?" she asked quickly.

"I'd rather not say yet. But I'd like to hear that story again with every detail you can think of. Do you mind? And let's talk in the Casa."

This time he listened to every word, stopping her again and again for additional details of time and place and sounds. When she finished he asked, "Do you still have that little gold arm with the silver hand?"

"Of course I have. I'm going to keep it as long as I can."

"Would five minutes be long enough? I've brought you a real one—of guiné wood—instead." He fished a tiny packet out of his pocket.

Penny looked curiously at the little wooden model, then gave it back. "Thanks, no. This isn't the same as mine."

He laughed and refused to take it. "Certainly it is. They're all alike."

"Wait a minute."

She brought out her scarfpin, slipped the little gold arm from its bar, and placed it on his hand beside the guiné arm. At first glance most people would have said they were the same. Side by side under the reading lamp, however, they revealed several differences.

Hers was the mold of a right arm and hand. His, of the left. Hers had the hand doubled threateningly into a fist, the thumb pressing against the forefinger and projecting a little above it. The fingers of the guiné hand were smoothly folded; the thumb, inserted between the first and second fingers, projected a little above. Then, of course, hers was of gold and silver; his, of this feather-weight wood generally used, as he had said.

Wythe Sloane whistled. "The plot thickens, as someone has said so well."

"Tell me what you know," Penny suggested. "Something must be done about this. People can't go around murdering other—"

"Don't be so American," he advised. "And don't jump to conclusions."

"I've told you twice what I know."

"And I'll tell you what I know—when I know it, or in politer words to that effect. If you'll let me take your Protecting Arm—your Unprotecting Arm, I should say—perhaps I can tell you tomorrow."

"What are you going to do with it? Use it in some sort of test?" At his nod she protested, "But you can't do that. You might destroy it. It's evidence. And, besides, I want it. It is a Protecting Arm. It protected me today."

He looked up sharply. "What happened today?"

She regretted her impulsive words. "Oh, nothing, really. I was jumping to conclusions, as you say."

"That doesn't make sense. Suppose you begin with the moment you left my office and tell me exactly what you saw, heard, and did until I arrived here tonight. I mean it," he declared when she looked dismayed. "For a young woman in Rio to rest, you have had a strenuous forty-eight hours. What has happened to both of us may hang together or may not. At any rate, tell me."

It was late and she was tired. With a start she saw that the clock marked almost exactly twenty-four hours since she had

climbed the hill to find that body on the veranda steps. She tried to protest again, could not utter a word.

"I know what time it is and what's on your mind," Wythe assured her. "I'm not going home and leave you here to have the jitters by yourself. And I want to know what happened this afternoon. Let's get through the next hour or two by talking it over quietly."

PENNY went into minute detail. But he asked for more.

"This youngster beside the railway shelter outside the north gate—you say he passed you, running. Did he stop to play in the street anywhere or go into a house or shop? Where did the young man in the fedora come from? You say he came running up. Do you think there is any connection between the running boy and running man?"

And later: "You say this young man—let's call him Fedora, for short—stared at your scarfpin. Are you sure it was the pin? Perhaps the Unprotecting Arm wasn't as well hidden as you thought. And you have no idea who your Brazilian was?"

Penny shook her head. She didn't feel up to telling Wythe about Rodrigo and all that had happened aboard the *Paraguay*, for one thing. For another, she felt that Dr. Attilio, if anyone, should be the first to hear her suspicions and certainties concerning that voyage. And finally something about Wythe's persistence disturbed her. Especially when he would tell her nothing of what he knew or thought himself.

"Fedora could have followed me up the Avenida to that café, then told the Brazilian where I was," she admitted wearily. "But I didn't see him. I wasn't thinking about him."

But his questions gave her no rest. "Perhaps Fedora was the man Mart saw beside the shelter when you returned. Perhaps there is a connection between Fedora and this man who was here to-night."

"Mukerji!" She opened her eyes, startled. "Could there be? Fedora was a Brazilian as far as I could see. Mukerji said he was Hindu."

"He might be anything. Something like forty or more nationalities are married and

intermarried in Brazil. You must have noticed the endless mixtures on the Avenida."

Wythe sat forward again. "Delfina says Mukerji was afraid of something. You say you think he was here to see someone or something. Perhaps you're both right. Delfina usually knows what she is talking about, and your reasoning about his inconsistent pronunciations and roving eyes sounds logical. Let's begin with the tangible thing or what seems tangible. What could he have wanted?"

With an effort Penny kept her face a blank. What could he have wanted but that little clay elephant! Yet no one could expect to find it here now. If he knew she had had it he must know for whom it was intended. Must know it had reached its destination.

She thought of that dinner party—the eyes recording Dr. Attilio's ill-concealed satisfaction. Wythe and the Cochrane had been in this living room when Dr. Attilio and his wife arrived. Wythe and Mart and his mother had outstayed the others. Wythe! Could he have watched, reported? Could it be Wythe?

She sat up uneasily, expecting to find him watching her. But he was not in his chair or in the room. To her surprise she heard him in the kitchen, heard the refrigerator door click and the motor whir on. Doors of cupboards opening and shutting. Then he was in the dining room, coming toward her with a tray in his hands.

"You looked and I felt as if food were indicated." Placing the tray on the low table before her couch, he opened and poured cold beer, turned back a napkin to reveal sandwiches. "Delfina left them ready."

Seating himself, he lifted his glass. "Cheer up, thoughtful lady. Shall I tell you a story while we eat—though not as fascinating as Dr. Attilio's? It might light a gleam in your mental darkness."

"It's your turn. My tongue is fringed from talking."

"Well, about a year ago," he began, "Dr. Attilio told Paul and Eleanor part of that story about Satan's Sixth Finger. He understood the difficulties and dangers involved if he were to try to go to London himself to get it.

"So he invited Paul to have a part in it.

Paul was to get the diamond and handle the financial end of it. You know Paul. He wouldn't cross the street to pick up a million if it took him away from his precious glassmaking for forty seconds.

"He refused—politely—and advised Dr. Attilio to leave the stone where it was until this war is over."

Wythe paused to munch a sandwich and study Penny appraisingly before he continued. "You probably know Eleanor better than I do. Know how completely wrapped up she is in Jay and sympathizes with his passion to live in the States, to have a permanent home, friends, roots."

"Help! You've lost Dr. Attilio somewhere."

"I'm coming to him. But Jay first. Just think of the poor kid. Born in Japan, educated in India and England, now living here. But he knows more about his own country, I'll bet, than thousands of fellows his age who live there. He's a fine chap and an excellent glassman, but his mind isn't on anything really but living in his own country."

"You don't need to convince me. He used to take me apart in India on everything from Coney Island to presidential elections."

"Well, though Paul refused to take up Dr. Attilio's offer, Eleanor didn't. If this stone is half as good as Dr. Attilio thinks it is, it must be worth in the rough between a half and three quarters of a million dollars. That ain't hay, as the American half of your friend Mart would say."

Penny put up an unsteady hand and touched the soft bob that had hidden a fortune for almost three weeks.

Wythe noticed the gesture. "To make it short, Eleanor and Dr. Attilio got together. Jay was to go to London with the proper credentials. Eleanor and Jay would receive a percentage of its sale price. Just how much I don't know, but to Eleanor it represented a permanent home in the States. I think she even hoped to persuade Paul to retire! That all clear?"

Penny nodded.

"Well, the diamond is here," Wythe declared. "And Jay isn't. By a curious coincidence it seems to have arrived on the very day you did."

Penny bent forward to set her glass down carefully. "How wonderful!" were

the only words that came to her.

"For Dr. Attilio, yes. What about Jay?"

"What about Jay?"

"I'm asking you."

"I don't know. I don't know where Jay is."

"No? Well, I do. He must be in New York. The diamond came in on the New York boat."

"How do you know all this?" she demanded suddenly. "And why are you telling me? I—I think this is something Paul or Eleanor should have told me—if they had wanted me to know."

"I know most of it from Eleanor," Wythe said quietly. "Paul knew nothing of Jay's going until he was gone. Then he was sunk—as you can imagine. So was Eleanor, when she realized, too late, what might happen to him. For hours I've figuratively held her hand while she waited and worried to hear from him."

Wythe rose to light the cigarette Penny had picked up and to light his own.

"Much of the rest I've figured out from a word dropped here and there. Anyone knowing what I know could have deduced from Dr. Attilio's manner that something very pleasing had happened."

"Now planes arrive in the morning. And Tuesday noon he looked like something on a hot griddle. The *Paraguay* docked in the afternoon—with the diamond, obviously—and you."

When she gave no sign of understanding the implication in his words he went on, "I'm telling you all this because I think you should realize you are in this up to the ears. I'm not the only one who believes you brought the diamond down. And not the only one who believes you must have brought something else—information, possibly; I don't know. Anyway, something that has a vital bearing on this stone."

Penny remained silent, stroking the sleeping Baroneza beside her.

"Use your head," he said sharply. "Do you imagine every young woman who arrives in Brazil has experiences like yours? Why not admit you brought Satan's Sixth Finger and information or a message? We've got to find it before someone else is——"

"Murdered?" Penny looked up quickly. "You do believe me now?"

WYTHE rose to draw his chair directly in front of her. "Let's not use that word—yet. But this is the way it looks to me.

"You arrived Tuesday afternoon. The Olivers left at dawn Wednesday morning. Wednesday evening someone tried to reach this house. Someone else tried to stop him. Does that suggest anything to you? Remember, several people suspected by that time that Dr. Attilio had the diamond."

"You mean you think it's this information—message—they believe to be here?"

"Just that. It took about twenty-four hours either to discover where you were or that you have whatever it is they want."

"But that's ridiculous. I haven't even got what I want myself. Just my own personal things, that's all."

"Money, jewelry, secret papers?"

"My money is in a letter of credit on a Rio bank. I've not even drawn on it yet. I don't care for jewelry and haven't any anyway. Papers? Some stationery and cleansing tissues——"

"What about clothes? Did you buy anything new before you left New York? send anything to tailors or cleaners? Could anyone who handled any of your things have slipped something into linings or hems without your knowing it?"

Penny heard him speaking, but her attention was far away—in the little passage that led to her cabin on the *Paraguay*. Seeing her door open inch by inch, then Dr. Rosario stepping out, to hurry away—book in hand.

"Penny!" Wythe was shaking her arm. "Are you asleep or ill?"

"Neither. I was just remembering something."

Penny's thoughts raced. She must be careful to avoid mention of Dr. Rosario, and Barbados.

"I forgot—about my books," she explained. "I brought in a package of books——"

"Books!" Wythe jumped up. "Who gave them to you? Where are they? You said Mukerji wanted to see them. Of course. Come on, let's get them."

But they didn't get them. The Baroneza, stiff-legged on the couch, was barking her small head off.

"What next?" Wythe hurried to the

door. There a hesitant hand clapping, the Brazilian equivalent for a doorbell, was growing louder and more insistent.

Penny followed him to see the old Negro gateman shuffling his feet on the veranda and bowing apologetically.

At sight of Wythe he was clearly relieved and burst into a jumble of Portuguese.

From his repetitions of *senhorita Americana* and oblique glances in her direction Penny knew his coming concerned her. At last with more bows the old man shuffled away.

"It's about Mukerji, isn't it?" she prompted when they turned back to the living room. "But they can't have been holding that poor idiot at the north gate for three hours!"

"They haven't been holding Mukerji at the gate for three hours. They've been expecting him for three hours. He hasn't appeared."

"That's impossible!" Penny cried. "That old Haile must have been sleeping and a watchman let Mukerji out. No, that's impossible, too, I suppose. But why did they wait three hours to investigate?"

"At first thought Mukerji had stayed longer than expected, you being young and, shall we say, charming? And the watchman after his ten- and eleven-o'clock rounds told him you were still up and someone here. Then Haile became concerned—thought perhaps you needed someone. He had to wait, however, for a watchman to return to relieve him at the gate. He was darned glad to find it was I who was keeping you up."

"What did you tell him to do?"

"To do nothing. If anything out of the ordinary seems to be happening on the grounds the watchman will call Mart. Lord! I hope nothing gets that human ferret out of bed. If the watchmen report nothing I told Haile to come back here when he goes off duty."

Wythe moved restlessly round the room, crushing out one cigarette, lighting another.

"Look here," he said finally. "Something's up and I'm worried. About your being here alone. About Paul being away——"

"You're not telling me everything."

"He said and he didn't mean to; it slipped out because the poor devil's in a panic

about losing his job—that this was the second time a man had come in the north gate and had not been checked out. When I asked him about the first time he crawled, said it was weeks ago. I think he lied. I think it was last night. I think it was the man you saw lying on the Casa steps." He stopped short. "Or the man responsible for his being there."

Penny took a deep breath but felt relieved too. There was no doubt that Wythe believed her story now.

"What do we do about it?"

"That's what I'm trying to decide. Perhaps I should take you in to stay with the Cochranes. Perhaps I should tell Cock—"

"He mightn't believe you any more than you believed me this afternoon," Penny interposed hastily. "We still have nothing but that Unprotecting Arm. And you laughed that off."

"That's what stops me, for one thing. Another is that Cock might turn everything over to the police. That wouldn't be pleasant for you or me personally, and it might bring the New York office down on our heads—and Paul's—"

"Paul's! That simply can't happen."

"Take it easy," he advised. "All this could have happened, I suppose, even if he had been here. It begins to look as if something were happening—or had been for some time."

"Nothing happened until I came. You said that yourself."

"That's true. But you may be just a— a lighted match tossed into dry grass."

He was talking to himself more than to Penny, thinking out loud. She remained quiet and waited. She had plenty to think about herself.

Wythe might be right about something going on under the surface. At least if what he had said about the existence of the diamond was true, wasn't it curious that Dr. Attilio should have denied so elaborately that it existed at all? And if it was the diamond that filled the clay body of the little elephant, she herself knew it existed. She was tremendously concerned, too, about Paul and Eleanor and, as she looked at him now, about Wythe.

This wasn't the self-sufficient man she had met—ages ago, it seemed. He was older than she had thought at first and

tired and uneasy than he wanted her to know.

His body sagged in the deep chair. Though he sat, elbow on chair arm, chin on palm, his face almost hidden, she could see his eyes. They were strained with concentration.

He lifted his head and looked at her, then smiled.

"The mastermind has an idea. Several of them, in fact. One is, there is some way of getting in and out of the Fabrica we don't know about. The second is—your Unprotecting Arm. I won't use it all, but I must have at least a link from that little chain."

Reluctantly she removed the scarfpin, detached the arm, and gave it to him. He put it carefully away in a pocket.

"Now, the third thing—those books."

"You'll have to get them then. They're beyond my reach."

He followed her toward the reception hall but, when she put her hand on a light switch, stopped her.

"Wait a moment. Do you know your way round here in the dark? If you don't I do." As he spoke he moved round the living room, dimming all the lamps but one.

"I think I do. Why?"

"We don't know where Mukerji is."

"You don't think he's anywhere about! Baroneza would never sleep like that if he were."

"No, I don't think he's in the house. Come on."

THEY moved cautiously over the highly waxed floor of the reception sala to Penny's room. The high windows, two on the north, four on the west, framed dark masses of mango trees and shrubs outside, a sky brilliant with stars, made darker and more brilliant still by the heavy screens and bars. In the enormous room the furniture loomed black except where three mirrors were luminous.

"Let's get the shades down," Wythe suggested, and, keeping in the shadow, they did.

In the bathroom he lifted down the bulky package of books and looked up at the high windows above their heads. "I guess this is as good a spot as any to go

over them. This house is alive with doors and windows."

Sitting on the tiled floor with the lamp of the dressing table between them, whispering like two conspirators, they went through the books. After they opened the package, that is.

Brazil takes deep interest in all printed matter that enters its boundaries. Customs inspectors may be casual about examining incoming bags, but they do a thorough job on books and magazines. The official who had examined Penny's books, after passing them, had had them neatly and almost irrevocably tied up again.

Wythe and Penny skimmed through them swiftly, looking for notes or writing inserted in them. Nothing.

"How many did you have?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

He counted quickly. "Seventeen it is."

They went through each one again, carefully, page by page. Nothing.

"Get the wrappers off and we'll take a look at the bindings."

Wythe was ripping off jackets as he spoke. Penny, following his example, gasped, "Look!"

The jacket she held out in one hand was new and shining, gay with title and design of a light summer novel. The book in her other hand, though giving small evidence of use, had obviously stood on the shelves of the SS *Paraguay's* library. On the inside front cover, concealed by the flap of the jacket, was the legend, "Property of the SS *Paraguay*; please return to Library."

Wythe seized it and started through it again. Penny sat quiet, a startled look in her shadowed eyes. The book was a biography of Fouché, by Stefan Zweig! When he turned to her questioningly she began to replace the jackets on the remaining books, now and then setting one aside.

"What are those for?"

"Dr. Attilio. I told him he could see them, and these seem to be the best——" she stopped. "What's the matter?"

"Did you offer them to him or did he ask to see them?"

"He asked. Why? We were just talking about books."

"Nothing." Wythe hesitated. "Just one of those silly questions one asks," he added

wearily. "I can't see anything out of the ordinary about this *Fouché*."

They looked at one another. She was tired. But he was neither so tired nor—for once—so polite.

"Water and sleep are indicated. How about getting some while I go over this opus again? If something's here I've missed it."

"Not—not without me," she protested with more energy than she felt. Then she sat up suddenly, not tired at all. "What about the gateman? Was he to come back here or go straight to Mart?"

Before she finished he was on his feet, pulling her up. "Come on. He mustn't go to Mart."

HE hadn't. He was waiting on the veranda, too scared to move. With the light in the living room dim and no sign of Wythe or Penny to answer his clapping, his poor old brain had simply stood still. He didn't know what to do next, so he had stood still too.

They brought him into the living room and closed the doors. His eyes, the whites, brown-stained and moist about dark pupils, were rolling in his deeply grooved black face. His arms beneath the old cape gestured helplessly. A battered hat trembled in one hand.

Nothing had been seen of Mukerji, he told Wythe in his jumbled Portuguese. The watchmen had come and gone on their rounds as usual. If Wythe said so, he'd go to Senhor Mart, but in the meantime, so that the morning gateman would not ask questions, he had checked Mukerji on his records as leaving at nine-fifteen.

"*Espera um momento*," Wythe told him. "Wait."

Turning to Penny, he translated, mumbled, then asked, "Can you bear this fragrant old rascal here for a few minutes more? I'd like to ask him some questions—about last night, for example."

Penny nodded and sank into a chair. She watched while little by little the old man wavered, then confessed whatever it was he had held back earlier in the evening.

Watched, too, when the ordeal was over, his confidence restored and his smiles and assurances of undying something or other as Wythe pressed money in his hand and saw him out the doors.

Wythe locked them securely before he crossed the room to look down at Penny with the greatest composure.

"Good news?" she asked hopefully.

"Hardly. But I think we've both passed the point where anything can surprise us now. At least I have. I've often wondered what my saturation point was. Tonight I think I know. One murder, another man missing, possibly a private spy or two, secret messages, and now the police on our trail. That does nicely."

"Police!" Penny's thoughts flew to her rescuer of the afternoon. "What did Haile tell you?"

"I won't repeat all he said, but the sense of it was this. A man did enter the grounds by the north gate last night—shortly after nine-thirty. He never went out. And who do you think he was?"

Wythe broke off then to admit, "I can't answer that question myself. But either the man you saw lying on the steps Wednesday night or the man who—as you think—murdered him was from the police or detective service. He flashed some sort of badge."

Before Penny's alarm his tone modified. "The thing that impresses me is this. Someone entered the north gate last night, someone important enough to make him risk his job by not reporting it. That clears the air a little.

"Two men came into the grounds last night. One, you saw. The other, we'll say, is responsible for what you saw. One came in by the north gate. How the other got in we don't know. Both came for the same thing. At least one came for something and the other obviously didn't want him to get it."

Wythe stopped again, after a moment threw up his hands. "I thought I was going to arrive somewhere when I started that masterminding, but now it's all as clear as mud. You go to bed, but give me that *Fouché* first. I'm going to put it under Paul's pillows and sleep on it. Maybe his or my unconscious can make something of it. I'm signing off."

Penny left him before his unconscious could make something of the thought in her mind. Mart, of course, could come and go at will, day or night, without using the north gate. But Mr. Cochrane, surely, could also come and go as he would. And

Dr. Attilio—why not? And Paul—if he were here!

Her thinking carried her to one of her north windows with one more name in her mind. Wythe's. She had watched him in the living room. And she had had to accept what Wythe told her of what had been said in Portuguese!

Suddenly she pressed close to the window to peer at the Casa gates. They were closed, but outside them someone was carefully using a small flash. As she watched its light turned upward for one brief instant. In that instant she recognized the bright red thatch of Mart.

XII

DELFINA woke Penny the next morning. "Get up, Miss Penny. Mr. Cochrane is here."

Penny sat up quickly. "Mr. Cochrane! What time is it?"

"Almost eleven. He wants to talk to you. Then he is going to take you back to Rio for luncheon and the afternoon with his wife, he says." Delfina's voice dropped. "But you can't go, Miss Penny. Dr. Wythe wants you to come to his office at two o'clock."

From the door Delfina added, "And Dr. Wythe said he was taking a book of yours to finish."

Penny showered and slipped into slacks. As she appeared in the living room Delfina, breakfast tray in hand, led the way to the veranda. There Mr. Cochrane rose to greet her.

"I'm sorry to wake you, Penny. But I had to visit the factories this morning, so stopped in to see how you are. We won't disturb you if you wish to be quiet, but both Madge and I want you to feel our home is yours."

"Will you have coffee or a drink—while I eat breakfast?" Penny asked.

"No, nothing for me. I really came to talk with you seriously, Penny."

She put down her coffee cup and resignedly took up a cigarette. He hastened to light it.

"Now, all set? I want to ask you a straight question and I want a straight answer. Why did Paul dash off without even a moment's notice?"

She shook her head slowly. "I'm afraid

I can't tell you, Mr. Cochrane. They were gone when I woke up."

"But didn't they leave a note of some kind—any message?"

"Just a line to say they would soon be back."

Mr. Cochrane waved that away too. "I expected you to say that. Now let's consider the preliminaries over."

Astonished at the change in his voice, Penny looked up. Mr. Cochrane was no longer the bland and paternal friend. His face was set and stern. Now he was much more understandable as the president of an American corporation in Brazil, she thought. But he gave her no time to think.

"As president of the U.E. in Brazil, I am responsible for Fabrica da Luz as well as the city offices. Paul is an excellent executive as well as one of the best glassmen anywhere. Then why, suddenly, like a heedless child, should he leave everything at loose ends?"

Penny looked at him squarely. "I can't believe Paul did, Mr. Cochrane. Dr. Attilio, Dr. Sloane, Mart, all the men I've met here are like the executives Paul had working with him in India—perfectly capable."

"Yes, yes, of course. That's not the point. This is the point, since you insist on evading it. I—we all spent the evening here Tuesday night. Up to midnight, it was evident, Paul had no thought of flying to New York. Yet he left at dawn. What did you tell him that changed his mind?"

When Penny did not answer he altered his tone. "I'm going too fast, but I see you understand me."

"I know nothing of business management, Mr. Cochrane, but I know Paul. It's too bad he didn't have time to talk with you, but I'm sure the first thing he'll do in New York, if necessary, is to make a satisfactory—"

His china-blue eyes were keen on her now. "I'm sure Paul left because of some very sufficient reason. But I do not believe his going had anything to do with the U.E." He waved that aside too. "Suppose we talk for a moment about you. Why are you here, for example?"

He paused to look at her skeptically. "After all, this is U.E. property. You have no connection with the U.E.—except as a

guest of Paul and Eleanor."

Color crept into Penny's cheeks, but she remained silent until she could smile at him. She knew that technique. Peppercut used it frequently to make her and others so angry they would speak without thought. "If you will give me half an hour I can move to a hotel."

Mr. Cochrane leaned back and laughed with pleasure. "Naturally not. I admire courage and loyalty in a woman, Penny. That's really what I wanted to know—that you could be trusted not to talk or lose your head. I know why Paul went to New York."

He rose then and held out his hand. "How about returning to Rio with me in an hour? Madge is looking forward to knowing you better."

"Not today, thank you. I'm simply awfully tired."

"Too tired to walk to the back gates with me?" His glance indicated the living room where Delfina could be seen and heard cleaning.

He paced beside her thoughtfully until they were out of range of the Casa. Then he turned with concern. "Take my advice, my dear, and be careful. More people than I believe you brought Satan's Sixth Finger to Dr. Attilio."

"How you talk!" Penny laughed. "How could I bring something that may not even exist?"

"Don't laugh," he warned sharply. "And don't be too clever. Dr. Attilio tried to be and revealed that the diamond had reached his hands. You tried to be and confirmed my information that Jay is in New York."

His amusement at her surprise was the equivalent of a chuck under the chin. "Ah, at last we find something to trade. If I tell you where Jay is, will you give me that message sent by Dr. Rosario to Dr. Attilio?"

Her eyes became alert. His expression changed to surprise, touched with chagrin.

"It was you, Mr. Cochrane, not the customs, who went through my things. You had them!"

"Of course," he admitted after a moment, his voice bland again. "I won't tell you how or why I knew to search your bags, but I certainly went through everything but your books. The customs had practically sealed them."

He stopped at the gates and put a hand on her arm. "Listen, my child. Paul is my best man in Brazil, and Dr. Attilio is his best man here. Do you think that when I see them walking blindly into a million-dollar-diamond scandal—yes, that's the word—I have no interest in saving the reputation of the U.E. as well as theirs and mine?"

"You're my last straw—a charming one and not fragile, I'm glad to discover. Perhaps you don't know you have that message. But sooner or later you'll find it. You must have it. And let me make this clear. When you do find it bring it to me. To no one else. If you don't, I can't be responsible for anything that might happen."

He pressed her arm gently, turned, and went his way down the back road.

Walking thoughtfully back to the house, Penny encountered Delfina on the kitchen terrace, hanging rugs to sun on the railing. Again her expression baffled Penny, and she paused expectantly. When Delfina, however, seized a brush and prepared for action she went on into the house.

As she entered the living room the telephone rang. For the first time since her arrival she answered it.

"I wish to speak with my husband, Miss Paget," Madge Cochrane's thin voice shrilled in her ear.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mrs. Cochrane. You can reach him at the lamp factory in a minute or two."

"He is there beside you now as he was yesterday, as he has been every day—"

Listening in amazement to the furious flow of words pouring over the wire, Penny felt the receiver abruptly leave her hand. Delfina, angry, too, replaced it with a bang in its cradle.

"I wish I had fleas," was her fervent comment.

Penny choked back her laughter. "What would you do with fleas?"

"Put them in her ears. Mr. Paul says that's the best thing to do when somebody wants to make trouble."

"She has called before? She believes Mr. Cochrane comes here?"

"She calls every day. Sometimes many times. You must not answer the telephone, Miss Penny."

As swiftly and silently as she had come,

Delfina returned to her rugs, leaving Penny to gaze at the telephone with unbelieving eyes.

SHORTLY after two o'clock Penny again approached the brown varnished doors of Wythe's office. This time they stood open, and Wythe himself was waiting in the sunshine there for her.

Not the same man who had risen so politely to greet her just twenty-four hours before. Though something of the reserve had gone from his manner, gravity weighted his smile and greeting.

Yet as they stood in the doorway a moment, looking out across the Fabrica wall to the little hills in the valley, her experiences in Rio seemed like some fantastic story read long ago.

New little houses, stuccoed in fresh pastel shades, dotting the hills everywhere, might have been gardens of giant flowers against the green of the slopes. A long white wall running across the top of one a half mile or more away looked for all the world like a great white crown resting on a soft velvet cushion.

"Dr. Attilio's home," Wythe told her, following her glance.

They entered the office then, and Wythe closed the doors securely behind them. The order and quiet there were similarly out of key with the thoughts in their minds.

Through the open doors to the laboratories she looked into an intricate but organized maze. Over the white walls, the gray tables and cabinets sunlight from high windows danced and sparkled among racks of test tubes, rows of reagent bottles, and various glass containers. Three young Brazilian men moved about at work there. Somewhere the secretary tapped on a machine.

Wythe closed those doors also and, placing a chair for Penny beside his desk, stood waiting. "No one will disturb us now," he said.

With tightening nerves she took the chair to listen. But he was in no hurry to begin.

"How much do you know about chemistry?" he asked finally.

The lightness of his tone was not real, but she took her cue from him. "I know two parts of oxygen and one of hydrogen, or the other way round, form water."

He turned from her abruptly. Pushing some papers aside, he looked at two rough little chunks of glass lying side by side on his desk. One was the same bit he had tumbled from hand to hand as he listened to her story on Thursday. The other was somewhat larger.

Now he did not tumble either of them in his hands. He did not even touch them. He sat looking at them with so intent, almost solemn a gaze, for so long, that the fearful anticipation lying tense in Penny turned to wonder.

She had not seen this Wythe before. Here was a man of more emotional depth and sensitivity than she had realized. Watching him, her interest quickened in the man instead of what she had come to hear. What else lay behind the curtains in his guarded eyes, behind his smooth, controlled face, she was thinking when his finger, tapping the desk lightly before the smaller bit of glass, recalled her.

"Do you remember this? If I had known its story yesterday and this one's"—indicating the larger piece—"a lot of things might be different today."

"They're just blobs of glass, aren't they?"

"Just blobs of glass," he repeated. "But if I could be sure that by destroying them and persuading you to go back to New York—"

"What then?" she prompted, while her own thoughts returned to all that had happened in New York of which he was unaware.

"That we could end this ghoulish business."

"We? You aren't involved except through me."

He gave her an odd veiled glance. "You saw a man lying on the Casa steps Wednesday night. You *think* he was dead—murdered. I *know* a man was killed on the Fabrica property Wednesday night."

He looked from one to the other of the pieces of glass, then drew from an envelope near them her Unprotecting Arm and placed it between them.

"The whole story is there for anyone who can read it. I haven't read it all yet."

As she struggled to understand his thought Penny drew a deep breath. This new Wythe, his voice deep with feeling, with something else she couldn't grasp,

exerted a curious force over her. He attracted her strongly, yet somehow, too, appeared to keep her away.

"If it's something so—so dreadful, Wythe, why don't we? Destroy the glass, I mean."

"It's too late. Whatever is behind this hasn't just begun. We can't stop it."

"Then let it go on without us!" she cried. "Let's get out of it right now! I'm—I'm really frightened—"

"Of what?" he asked quickly. "For what?"

"Of what you say. For both of us. You may be next—or I!"

Again that glance. "Have I frightened you so much? Or has something else happened?"

"I don't know—really. Perhaps it's just that so many things—one after the other—have happened. Mr. Cochrane came to the Casa this morning. He knows about the diamond. He knows why Paul went to New York. And he believes I brought a message—"

Wythe whistled. "So Cock is around playing the big, bad wolf. Interesting. Very."

He leaned forward unexpectedly and tilted her chin with a finger. "You're here." He smiled. "The diamond's here. And so are these." He nodded at the bits of glass and Unprotecting Arm. "This isn't going to be easy to give or to take," he warned. "I'll make it as simple and short as I can. But if I'm not clear or if I omit anything you want to know, stop me and ask. Promise? The place we're coming out is so far removed from everyday experience you must know every step of the way back."

XIII

WYTHE picked up two large empty electric bulbs from a tray on his desk and looked down at one of them a moment before passing it to Penny.

"We make two kinds of glass here in Fabrica da Luz—lead glass and lime glass. At present we are making only lead glass. We supply all the lamps used on Rio's streets. Now we are busy on a huge rush order for them. They are made of lead glass."

"That one you are holding in your hand is made of lead glass. It came from one of

four pots in our Number Two Furnace. It was made on Wednesday."

At her vague glance he smiled. "I'll take you over later to the glass factory and show you the furnaces and how glass is made and a lamp blown. But perhaps you can understand this now."

"We have three furnaces in the glass factory. Each furnace contains eight pots. In these pots the mixture for making glass is placed like—like pouring sugar into eight sugar bowls. The only difference is that all eight pots in one furnace are seldom filled with a new mixture at one time."

"Tuesday—the day you arrived in Rio—four of the eight pots in Number Two Furnace were filled at the same time with the same mixture. That means all were subject to the same heat and a lot of other things you don't need to know about for the melting process."

"Wednesday morning those four pots were opened and perfect glass bulbs—like that one in your hand—were made from all of them. The pots were closed up Wednesday night and opened again Thursday morning."

"Thursday morning the same glass blowers who worked the pots on Wednesday made perfect lead-glass bulbs from three of them."

"Three?" Penny asked to show she was following him intelligently.

"Three." He touched the lamp in her hand. "That's a perfect lamp. The end is round, the glass clear. Hold it up to the light."

She did. Except for its larger size, it was exactly like the bulbs she used in her New York apartment.

"Now look at this one." He gave her the second shell. "See any difference?"

"Of course."

The end of the second shell was flat, like the bottom of a flash, and had a large irregular dent in it. And when she held it against the light she could see little specks or bubbles in the neck.

"That particular shell has nothing to do with what I'm saying except as illustration," he told her. "It was made some time ago. But its irregular shape and the cords or seeds—you called them specks and bubbles—will show you what I mean. Now take a deep breath."

"That shell in your hand is made of *lime*

glass. Lime glass requires more heat than lead glass to melt it and to make it sufficiently fluid to be blown into the shape of a lamp."

"When a lime-glass mixture is melted, therefore, in a furnace regulated for a lead-glass mixture the glass is too thick, too stiff, to be blown properly. The glass blowers have great difficulty in handling it. Frequently they don't have breath enough to blow the glass evenly down to the bottom of the mold."

"That flattened and concave dent you see in this lamp shell is a frequent result. But dents can appear in one side or the other. Now is all that clear so far?"

Penny nodded as she gave the shell back to him. Inwardly she was wondering what a lecture on glassmaking had to do with a man murdered on the Casa steps.

But Wythe's finger was tapping the desk again before the smaller chunk of glass.

"Thursday morning Orlando—one of my laboratory boys—went out on his regular round of the glass factory to bring back samples of glass from each pot in the three furnaces. It's part of our routine to check those samples every day as soon as they come in."

"The foremen for furnaces one and three each gave him eight samples. The foreman of Number Two Furnace gave him seven. When Orlando asked for the eighth the foreman told him Pot Seven had been closed for the day, that something was wrong with the mixture."

"My boys are keen to learn everything possible about glassmaking in Brazil, so Orlando asked for a sample from Pot Seven anyway. The foreman picked up this piece from the floor and gave it to him. See?"

Wythe turned the sample about before Penny carefully. "It's just a rough fragment of glass. Nothing unusual about it, except it appears very wavy and a little milky."

He looked at it himself for a long moment before he went on.

"Orlando brought this sample to me when he returned and told me what had happened. Suspecting that some foreign material might have been thrown into the glass mixture, I told him to ask my analyst to test it for calcium and excess aluminum."

We are very busy these days, and that was a neat short cut.

"Just a minute or two before you arrived yesterday Dr. Assis, my analyst, brought me back this sample of glass and his analysis of it.

"He found in the glass a rather low percentage of aluminum but a high percentage of calcium and phosphorus. Calcium and phosphorus as well as aluminum are apt to produce wavy glass, and phosphorus will also cause that milkiness I showed you.

"While you were telling me about your experience on Wednesday night my mind kept going back to what Dr. Assis had reported. I was wondering why Pots Five, Six, Seven, and Eight in Number Two Furnace could all have contained good lead glass on Wednesday but only Pots Five, Six, and Eight contain it on Thursday.

"I suppose that was why I picked up the piece of glass and played with it while I listened to you. 'What happened in Pot Seven Wednesday night?' I kept asking myself. Where could calcium and phosphorus come from?

"But after you left I thought of you and what you had told me. Your story kept getting in the way of my thinking about this glass sample from Pot Seven. First, I'd think about the glass and then about something you'd said until in a curious sort of way the two problems—shall I call them?—were blended together.

"An explanation for the calcium and phosphorus in the glass sample popped into my mind but was too incredible to accept. I went over Dr. Assis' analysis again and wasn't satisfied with it. So I sent Orlando back for a second and larger sample from Pot Seven. This is it."

Wythe picked up the larger lump of glass and placed it near her. "You'd better look at it."

Penny took it uncertainly. She couldn't see where this long explanation was heading, but from the seriousness and care with which Wythe selected each word she was beginning to feel again that same tingle of terror she had known on the Casa veranda Wednesday night.

"It—it looks just like the other piece," she heard herself saying in a voice unlike her own. Thin and brittle, it came from the top of her throat.

"Does it? Are you sure?"

She turned it round again. "Well—except for this." She touched a tiny hole of yellowish-brown color, about the size of a pinhead. From it blurred streaks of brilliant red ran out like rays.

"I saw that too," he agreed significantly. Taking the sample back, he placed it carefully beside the other.

"We tested this second piece of glass late yesterday afternoon," he went on slowly. "It, too, contained calcium and phosphorus. No doubt about it. And then when my boys went home at five I tested this little spot of red. Perhaps you can see where I chipped some of it away?"

"Two things are commonly used to make glass red. One is selenium. The other is gold. As we have selenium here in the factory, I tested for that first, naturally. Selenium, however, did not stain that glass. So I tested for gold. And gold it was—is."

Something was struggling to click in Penny's mind.

WYTHE gave her no time to concentrate on it.

"From the time I finished those tests until I went up to see you at eight-thirty or so I sat at this desk thinking about them. No, as Delfina no doubt told you, that isn't all I did. I wore out the wires calling her about you. I was in a state of mind by that time about your going outside the grounds alone.

"But I still wasn't willing to admit what my tests were telling me. And when Delfina finally telephoned to say you were back I kept putting off the moment of going up to see you. I wasn't eager to. I didn't know how to tell you what I'm telling you now. Or how you would take it."

"You aren't eager to tell me now, are you?" she asked. "And why didn't you tell me last night?"

"Your Unprotecting Arm—of gold and silver—for one thing. As soon as I saw it was not a real *figa* I decided to make another test. To make it this morning and to tell you the results of all my tests in my office—when the sun would be shining and the setting more—more realistic."

"And now?"

"You don't know? You haven't understood?"

Penny looked away from his searching eyes. One part of her mind was numb with horror. The rest would not believe what her ears had heard. She shook her head.

"Calcium may come from a number of different sources," Wythe began again, watching her keenly. "A tile, a chunk of cement, a brick, a piece of pottery or marble. Any one of them dropped into a glass mixture would produce it.

"But it seemed unlikely these would melt completely at the usual furnace temperatures. Or that a sufficient quantity of any one of them to produce the high percentage of calcium Dr. Assis found would be thrown into a pot.

"It seemed still less likely that the common variety of such articles to be found around a factory or in this section of the city would contain gold. In the light of what you told me, it occurred to me that one other thing could do it."

Penny's eyes, wide and fearful on his, asked the question.

"Yes. The body of a man."

His eyes searched her face again before he added, "Calcium and phosphorus are the essentials of the ashes of a man's body."

XIV

WHEN Penny said nothing Wythe's face cleared. But inside her something leaped as if a shock of cold electricity had been released. It ran over her in icy waves to focus about her throat.

"After you left yesterday I suspected the truth," he went on then. "But I couldn't—perhaps wouldn't—believe it. The analysis of the second sample, however, proved that a man—a man, mind you—had been murdered here. And when this morning I tested a link of the broken chain on your Unprotecting Arm—" He stopped, said abruptly, "I have one more test to make. It will take longer."

"Why? Isn't this—enough?"

"No. You saw a body lying on the Casa steps Wednesday night. Near those steps you found this little arm. I know a man's body was destroyed in Pot Seven

Wednesday night and that with it was destroyed some sort of gold ring or rings. This final test will prove whether the man you saw and the man whose body was placed in Pot Seven were the same man or two different men."

Penny remained still. Wythe swung round in his chair to look up at the high window above him. Its light revealed how pale his own face had become. After a few minutes he swung back, looking at his watch.

"It's after three, Penny. If you can take any more we'll go over to the glass factory and I'll show you exactly what happened." He smiled a little. "After all, you started this. Now we've got to see it through. And I've already asked Dr. Attilio if I could show you around."

"I—I want to know," Penny told him. "Somehow I feel better now. Knowing is much easier than suspecting, imagining—being afraid."

"O.K. then. Let's go." Wythe rose. "But remember, you're just a visitor in Rio, seeing the sights of the big city."

Leaving the little path to the office doors, they turned left on the pavement and passed a series of warehouses where men were loading trucks with cartons of lamps. Soon they entered the shadowed section of the factories where flamboyant trees arched on both sides. Here the glass and lamp factories stood well back from the road on a raised stone-banked terrace.

As the first floor of the glass factory was given over to the checkerwork of the three great furnaces and storage space, he led her up an outside stairway directly to the floor where the lamps were blown.

They stopped in the entrance of a dim and vast room while Wythe looked about for Dr. Attilio. He was not difficult to identify. His large, dignified figure loomed above men in the simplest working clothes, working in groups down the long floor. Dr. Attilio was exceptionally well groomed, even to a tiny purple orchid in his lapel.

"This is a pleasure, Miss Penny," he said, hurrying forward. "You are enjoying Rio?"

"I'm thrilled with what I've seen so far."

"Perhaps you see us with a visitor's eyes. Most foreigners find much to be improved here. Especially North Ameri-

cans. They are expert improvers—and very good for Brazil."

Wythe, beside Penny, moved suddenly, and Dr. Attilio smiled. "Here's another work-bound North American, impatient to return to his laboratories to improve Brazilian glass. Shall we send him back? It will give me great pleasure to show you...."

"Not at all, Dr. Attilio," Wythe assured him. "I've told Penny how busy you are. Besides," he added, taking her arm to draw her away, "your expert knowledge would be wasted on her. My explanations will do very well."

Dr. Attilio laughed and stepped back. "I'm sure he misjudges you, Miss Penny. If you think so, too, come back to me—any time."

"Thank you, Dr. Attilio. And my books are ready for you any time." When they were safely down the floor she turned to Wythe.

"Don't say it," he apologized. "I had to get rid of him. 'Expert knowledge'—nice touch."

"I understood that. I was about to admire his English. It's a lot better than yours or mine."

"Most Brazilians in high places speak English and French, German or Italian. They have a gift for languages. Look at Delfina. You can't use a word today she won't be tossing around tomorrow."

They were passing Number One Furnace, or rather the top of it. The base ran down through the first floor into the ground. Set into this igloo-like dome, shoulder to shoulder, around its complete circumference were eight fat cream-colored pots. Round mouths open, molten glass radiant at different levels in their interiors, they shriveled Penny with their hot breath.

Around the furnace on tiny podiums were the glass blowers. Some stood firmly and with a lovely grace, holding their blowpipes to their lips to trumpet soundlessly like so many incognito Gabriels. Others swung their pipes in rhythmic arcs, the tips of red-hot glass weaving patterns of light in the dimness.

Still others were inserting pipes into iron molds at their feet to round out the glass pendants into finished shells. A few, while exchanging empty pipes for fresh ones apprentices supplied, took time to

inspect Wythe and his guest.

Two more furnaces similarly busy ranged down the floor. And far beyond them, stacked in rectangular pyramids on floor and wooden tables, were assortments of lamp globes. Sunlight from open windows at the end of the room illumined their translucent blues, greens, grays, rose. Here and there like banks of fresh snow were the huge white globes used in Rio's streets.

Wythe stopped her beside the second furnace. "Can you look as if I were explaining this just for your casual interest?" he asked. And while he said one thing with his hands for the eyes of others, he said another for her ears.

"We're now in front of Number Two Furnace. Notice anything about its position? No, don't look round; I'll tell you. It stands between those offices for recording machines and what not behind us and that area of plain wall across from us. Back and front they shut this furnace off from outside observation. No silhouette or movement here could be seen from the outside by the night watchmen.

"Theoretically all night long a watchman should go round this floor every hour. Actually he slips himself a cigarette in the back room or, if he is really conscientious, strolls around Number One Furnace. Anyone near Number Two would have plenty of time to get out of sight when he heard a watchman coming up that stairway we climbed.

"There's another stairway on the back of the building. But it isn't lighted at night and the watchmen don't use it. Its door opens just behind us, beside that last little office. Now it's closed to prevent drafts.

"That's the stairway the—*the murderer*, I think, used or would have if he knew this factory, and it appears he did. Luck was with him and against him, too, because two firemen are always on duty at night here. They keep the fires regulated.

"From shortly after ten o'clock Wednesday night they were busy cleaning the grates downstairs. I checked that first thing. The noise they make would cover any sounds up here."

"What was the bad luck then?" Penny interrupted.

"That the firemen *were* downstairs. I

think the body was brought here to be thrown on the powerful fire of one of the grates. That would have been much simpler."

"Simpler?"

"Yes, and less dangerous. I'll explain in a minute."

WYTHE drew her round a step to stand directly in front of a pot.

"That is Pot Seven. Five and Six are on our left. Eight, on our right. This man near me is Tonico, one of our best glass blowers."

He smiled up at the worker who, aware that Wythe was talking about him, made some extra flourishes with his pipe.

"Tonico usually works a pot alone. On Wednesday he had Pot Seven. Therefore, it's safe to say when he knocked off for the day the pot was left about half full.

"He had Pot Seven again on Thursday morning. When he found the mixture stiff, making shells like that one with the dent in it I showed you, he reported to the foreman. And, when Dr. Attilio arrived on the dot of eight-thirty, as he has every morning since this factory went up, the foreman reported Tonico's complaint. Dr. Attilio ordered the pot closed."

Wythe hesitated, then went on steadily.

"A man's body, especially a small man's, could be placed in a pot. If it were—disembled. On the grates below that wouldn't have been necessary. That's why I said the murderer was unlucky. He brought the body here to throw it on a fire and get away quickly. When he found the firemen there he had to do something else—and fast. He came up the back stairway. You see now?"

Penny nodded. "Go on."

"But when he got it here he found the pot mouths too small for his purpose. He must have—operated on the body—in the dark on the outside platform of the stairway. The rain removed all traces. I'm just guessing, but that seems logical. He certainly didn't do it in here."

Wythe stopped abruptly. "I wonder what he did with the clothes."

Penny moistened her heat-dried lips. "But wouldn't Tonico have noticed? I mean, wouldn't the level of the molten glass have been different—on Thursday

morning? Higher?"

She was startled to hear her own voice asking the question, though it was in her mind. "Wouldn't he see—?"

"What could he see? Flesh would be consumed almost immediately at the temperatures of these furnaces. Any gases would be carried off rapidly through the openings between walls and roof. The skeleton would be reduced to a layer of loose bones floating on the surface of the red-hot glass. The bones would be slowly dissolved, leaving the mixture Tonico found Thursday morning. That is—a stiff and thick lime glass!"

Wythe looked at her questioning. "I can go into details if you wish, but they're not—not pleasant. Besides, I want you to understand something else.

"A man's body, if put into one of these pots, wouldn't sink to the bottom of the mixture. It would float. So would any small pieces of metal on that body. The rest of the chain of that Unprotecting Arm, for example. But only for example, remember.

"Some small pieces of metal did go into this mixture. How many, I don't know. But I can't believe that second sample of glass from this pot could have registered the only one.

"You see, in the glass mixture there are, among other things, soda ash and niter. They act as a sort of spoon. They help to keep the mixture stirring during the melting and refining processes. Really, this stirring is due to gases they produce. They bubble up through the mixture in the same way that boiling water bubbles."

He paused again. "I'm afraid this is a very long explanation. Getting tired?"

"Awfully," Penny confessed. "But finish it—if all this is necessary."

"It is. Well, when this mixture is all melted and all the gases have been given off, the glass lies quiet, like stiff molasses. Then it's ready to be blown into shells. Into perfect shells or bulbs, that is. That was the kind of lead glass Tonico used all day Wednesday.

"When he started work on Thursday he naturally drew his glass from the top of Pot Seven, where the bones of the skeleton had been dissolved. As the mixture had not been stirred up by anything that would cause that surface layer of

'high lime' to be distributed through the rest of the mixture, the result was—the result was that poor Tonico tried to blow lead-glass lamps from lime glass!"

Wythe broke off. When his silence continued Penny turned to see his eyes narrowed on Pot Seven.

"What's the matter?"

"My two samples of glass came from the surface of that layer, too, of course," he answered, half to himself. "If the man who put that body there knew his chemistry he'd need only to take off the top layer to clear the mixture. Below it would be the original lead glass! I must think up some discreet questions for Orlando to ask the foreman of this furnace."

Again he was silent so long Penny became uneasy. The glass blowers were beginning to turn curious glances in their direction.

"What about the gold in that second sample?" she prompted. "How did it get into the pot if—the clothes were taken away?"

"I don't know. It must have been on the body itself. The murderer either didn't see it in his haste and the darkness and rain or thought it too small to matter. This is the point about the gold. The physical properties of any metal put into a mixture like this would be destroyed. Their shapes, however, particularly if the pieces were small, would be retained."

At her puzzled glance he explained: "That is, a long thin piece would leave, more or less, a long thin line as an impression of its presence. A small round piece would leave a small round impression. And if the metal were gold it would leave its impression in color. That again is due to lack of stirring."

"And one of those tiny links on my Unprotecting Arm would leave that little round dot on the second sample! Oh, Wythe, let's go. I can't listen to any more!"

"Take a deep breath. You're all right. If we don't go round the rest of the floor Dr. Attilio will be out to show it to you. And don't jump to conclusions. I won't know for some time whether that dot in the second sample and those gold links on the Unprotecting Arm have anything in common."

He took her arm in a firm grasp and

drew her away. "Come and look at this *lehr*—oven to you," he said in a clearer tone as two American men came down the floor with Dr. Attilio. "It takes three hours for those globes to travel from one end of that moving belt to the other. This is where they're annealed so they won't crack and drop on that long bob when you're walking along the streets."

So they moved slowly down the long—the endless—room and back to the doorway and down the stairs and out into the sunlight.

On the terrace at last, they dropped down on a bench beneath the mango tree. The sun was sinking through graying clouds to settle for the night in a nest of mountains. But neither sky nor mountains nor the delicately changing light held charms for them now.

WYTHE, looking over Penny's head, whistled softly. "Don't turn round," he warned. "Mart's coming down the back road from the Casa—looking for you, perhaps. Listen; could you do a little expert work on that lad?"

"On Mart?"

"Why not? Oh, I know he's Paul's white-haired baby, but he isn't mine. And I've just thought of something. Mart's house may be the other entrance into the Fabrica we are looking for! Why didn't I think of that before? Our mysterious visitors could walk through his front door into his garden and enter by a little private gate."

"But the dogs. Delfina says they're really dangerous."

"Not with Mart around. Find out where he has been these past nights."

As Penny opened her lips to say where he had been last night, or rather early that morning, Wythe warned again, "Careful. Here he comes."

"So!" Mart's voice complained loudly behind them. "I now have to see before my very eyes—"

They jumped up and turned to find him glaring at them. "Move on. We can't have the uppah clawsses putting ideas into the heads of weary toilers. They'll pour out of those doors any minute now. Such goings on!"

"Count me in with the weary toilers," Wythe groaned. "And do something

about cooling that glass factory. I've been showing Penny the sights and I don't think either of us will ever be the same again."

"Well, if you can make it to your laboratories alone I'll heave Penny up the hill. With Paul away, I have all the little grass roots up there to care for. Now is as good a time as any to look at them."

Without waiting for a reply he seized Penny's arm and turned her toward another of his short cuts.

"Let go of me, dynamite," he said as soon as they were beyond Wythe's hearing. "First you put on pretty slacks to seduce our worthy president. Now you flaunt that fetching costume to lead our intellectual chemist astray."

"So!" Penny mimicked. "You've been hanging 'over the gates again!'"

"Again! What do you imply? Or is it infer?"

"That I saw you last night—this morning, I mean."

When he roared with laughter her rage rose again. "Stop that. It isn't funny."

"Funny? I think I'll just have the gardener run his lawn mower over that mop of yours and end all this. Paul left a note that if a hair of your head was harmed he'd have my neck when he returned. Well, when my dogs began to rage last night I rolled out to see what was up. Perhaps you think *that's* funny. A hard-working man tumbling out in the cold wintry dawn!"

He grinned at her, rather pretended to leer in a particularly horrible way. "Nothing was out of place except Dr. Sloane!"

When she refused to rise to that bait he continued, "The gate sheet showed he hadn't checked out. And though I didn't give a damn if he'd choked on some of his own brews in that untouchable laboratory of his, I know my duty. I investigate. And what do I find? His car outside. No lights inside and no one either. Where could he be? Like a flash I know. Where would any ladybug be if he could? Shall I go on?"

"Skip to the slacks, please," Penny said hastily.

"My deep interest in Paul's grass roots took me to the Casa this morning—as soon as I thought you might have opened those lovely eyes. Too late again. You

were already focusing them on our *presidente*. Learn anything?"

"You have a low mind, Mart. Mr. Cochrane was kind enough to stop in to see how I was—"

"Oh, I don't mean you could learn anything from him. Perish the thought! I mean was he able to penetrate the chilly granite of yon fair skull?"

Mart stepped in front of her. "I warned you once to keep away from that laboratory smootie. Now I'm telling you to keep away from everyone. You have a good alibi—rest, quiet, sun are essential. Play it for all it's worth. Otherwise even a smart fellow like me can't keep you intact—till and if Paul returns."

Penny stepped round him to walk with head high to the gates. "Won't you come in?" she invited there with stony politeness.

Mart threw up his hands. "Spare me that."

"But the little grass roots," she reminded him. "You haven't seen them for as much as—fifteen minutes."

"Their green innocence is natural. And I can see from here they're doing all right. Just watch them and maybe you'll learn something. Almost anything would be a help. *Até logo*."

He swung on his heel and strode back down the road. Excited barking inside the gates recalled Penny from her thoughtful observation of his receding back.

"No walk today," she apologized, slipping inside. "Oh, I'm such a fool, Baroness. I'm afraid. And I don't know who or what it is that frightens me."

To escape Delfina's eyes she walked round the house to the veranda and stretched out in a swing. Baroneza curled up beside her in a warm, comforting ball.

Where did Mart come into this? And why did he always appear at strategic moments? She could understand his antipathy for Wythe, Wythe's for him. But Mart seemed to have neither loyalty nor respect for anyone but Paul. And with a loyalty so strong—or at least vocal—would he permit anyone who had no business within the Fabrica walls to use his private gate?

Superintendent of grounds! That didn't require any particular technical experience, did it? Could Mart hold a position like that as a private eye for Paul?

Paul had had such a man in India. The more she thought of it the more improbable it seemed that Mart would use his little gate against Paul's interests.

She smiled to herself. Paul would be amused to hear Mart's report that Wythe had spent a night in the Casa. Or would he? If Mart were his private eye he wouldn't be amused to know she had gone to Wythe when he'd told her to go to Mart.

Well, after this, she resolved, she wouldn't go to anyone. She'd keep her knowledge to herself and confine her attention to her own small affairs. The less she knew when this ghoulish thing, as Wythe called it, broke, the better it would be for all of them.

SHE was trying to remember all that Wythe had explained about glass manufacture, when Dr. Attilio appeared around the side of the Casa.

"See? I am a man of his word," he told her as he took her hand. "But first, you found interest in my factory?"

"Oh yes." She tried to inject enthusiasm into her eyes and voice. "Someone should paint your glass blowers—especially Tonico. He's as graceful as a dancer."

"So Tonico is what kept you so long beside Number Two Furnace!" Dr. Attilio was amused but pleased too. "And I thought it was my glass that absorbed you."

He seated himself beside the swing. "You are right. Someone should paint Tonico—and the others.* Alas, their day will soon be done. With the new factory, lamps will be blown by machinery."

"Coffee? Something else to drink?" Penny asked.

He shook his head. "No, my dear young American. Unfortunately customs are different in my country. I must stay but a moment—just long enough to see your books."

Penny brought out the half dozen she had set aside for him. He picked them up, one at a time, glanced at their titles, and put them aside. "How beautifully you do books in America! And what beautiful prices we must pay for them here. I shall read all of these. But—you have more?"

"Those are the best."

"If you will, Miss Penny, let me see them all. You over-estimate my taste for English."

But when she brought out the rest he put them aside after a rapid inspection. "I admit defeat. These, no."

Impulsively Penny threw overboard Mart's warnings, her own recent decision to confine herself to her own affairs. "I have one more," she told him, watching through her lashes his face light up. "Dr. Sloane is reading it now. It's not a mystery, but there is a mystery about it."

"Yes?"

"On the voyage down someone entered my stateroom, searched my things several times. Once I saw who it was. A very gentle old man."

Dr. Attilio's face became still. "Perhaps," he suggested quietly, "your story amplifies mine—of Tuesday night?"

"Perhaps. That is why I thought to tell you, Dr. Attilio."

He rose. "Shall we talk in the house? It grows dark and will be cool here shortly."

When she rose, too, he spoke again softly. "But tell me now, Miss Penny. This book Dr. Sloane is reading—it is a biography of Fouché?"

WITHOUT waiting for her to answer in words he hurried to open the doors to the living room. "And now," he prompted as soon as they were seated.

"You spoke of Barbados," she said hesitantly, "of a kinsman of yours—found dead there. I—I think he was on the ship with me."

"You will describe the gentle old man first, please."

As she added detail to detail of what she had observed about the first Dr. Rosario his face darkened, became set. "He was without doubt my kinsman—cousin—Dr. Rosario de Sousa." For an instant Dr. Attilio's long, flexible fingers quivered on the arm of his chair. "And the others—tell me quickly, Miss Penny."

He shook his head when she described Senhor Rodrigo. "So many Brazilians, Argentinians, Chileans"—he threw out his hands—"are medium height, slender, brown-skinned, black-haired. I do not recognize him."

"Before I describe the man who came

aboard at Barbados I'll tell you what happened."

Rapidly Penny sketched her hours in the bay on B Deck and their arrival at Barbados. Dr. Attilio listened intently without interruption.

When she finished he spoke quietly, almost impersonally. "It was then Dr. Rosario sent me the wireless to say you had a message for me in *Fouché*, a book about which we had some correspondence when it was first published years ago. When you did not have your books here Tuesday evening I did not press the matter. I—I have Satan's Sixth Finger, thanks to you. Of that we will speak later, when the Olivers return."

He sat silent for a long minute. "I—for a time I have thought I would say no more—do no more about that message. My kinsman is dead. I did not know him well, have not seen him for many years. He was a diamond expert in Amsterdam. It is too late to help him now. And that message——"

Slowly he shook his head, rose. "No, I shall not speak of it to you. Let Dr. Sloane read the book. He can find nothing. And I—I think I do not want to know what that message says."

The telephone bell crashed into a silence Penny did not dare to break. She slipped hastily into the foyer and took up the receiver.

"This is the voice of the little grass roots," Mart informed her. "Get that bird out of there. In ten minutes I'm bringing up my dogs."

"Keep them where they belong. I'm busy."

"Well, half an hour, then. Not a moment longer." The connection broke off in her ear.

Dr. Attilio was still standing as she had left him. "You will tell me now about Barbados? What happened there?"

She told him rapidly. Every sound outside suggested the baying of Mart's savage dogs.

Dr. Attilio did not press her for details, but when she told of her discovery of the false Dr. Rosario he turned suddenly to stone. She felt as if she were talking into space or down a well. Not a glance or movement revealed his thoughts. When she finished he asked, "You have not re-

peated this story to anyone else?"

She shook her head.

"Good. You will not? For the present?"

"No," she promised. "Then you think I was right? There were two Dr. Rosarios?"

"There was only one Dr. Rosario," he corrected. "The other—— But it is unthinkable that that man can have returned to this country!" His voice changed. "You have seen him again?"

"No. Only Senhor Rodrigo. On the Avenida Thursday afternoon."

"Miss Penny, I have changed my mind. I must have that *Fouché*. You can get it from Dr. Sloane—discreetly, of course? You will not mention my name?"

"If you don't need it tonight it should be simple. He'll probably finish it——"

"Good. I count on you," Dr. Attilio moved toward the door, turned back suddenly. "These men—Senhor Rodrigo and the—other. They do not know you suspect?"

"I'm afraid they do know, Dr. Attilio. Senhor Rodrigo at least."

His face grew graver still, if that were possible. "Then it is important—for your own sake—to get that book for me."

"For mine?"

"Yes, Miss Penny. I can do nothing until I have that information. You are not safe here—alone. And we cannot go to the police—yet."

To his surprise Penny smiled and held up a hand. "Listen. Those are Mart's dogs. He's bringing them up to spend the night in the Casa grounds."

An answering smile flicked across Dr. Attilio's dark eyes. "In that case I need have no worries for you tonight. But Mart? Why does he do this? What does he know?"

Penny shook her head. "So far as I know, nothing at all. Paul asked him to keep me out of mischief."

"Paul knew before he left you would need such protection!"

"No, no. This is Mart's own idea."

"I wonder." Dr. Attilio stepped out on the veranda slowly. "Have you any reason to think, Miss Penny, that Paul did not go to New York? That he is in Rio?"

The sound of barking dogs grew louder. He did not wait for an answer

but hurried down the steps and round the path to the Casa gates.

XV

STRETCHED out in a lounge chair on the lawn late Saturday morning, Penny felt life still included some pleasant moments after all. In the gardens the mosquito men she had wanted to see ever since Wythe mentioned them were conveniently at hand. Two dark, short men in cotton khaki uniforms and black-visored khaki caps, they poked about, examining the pipes of the swimming pool and all the nooks and corners of the gardens where water might collect.

Finally they settled down to a detailed inspection of the lily pond. Occasionally as they peered and poked they turned curious glances on her. But that, she felt, was fair enough, for her own curious gaze never left them.

One of them soon departed, indicating with dramatic gestures that he would return. The other, seating himself on the pool's ledge, apparently fell asleep.

Perhaps Penny dozed herself. When she looked again the missing man had returned and was pouring minute fish from a battered pail into the pool. Two men in blue uniforms stood watching him.

Delfina, appearing to say her luncheon was served, eyed the newcomers with disfavor. The khaki-clad men, she explained on the way to the house, were *mata-mosquitos*—mosquito killers. They were outside men who came once a week to go over the grounds. The blue-uniformed men were *ajudantes*, a combination of inspector of the work of the outside men and, in their own right, inside men.

"What are they doing here so late on Saturday?" Delfina grumbled. "Now they'll poke into every corner of my clean house." As she served Penny she complained still more. "One of them is new. The *senhora* would call him a new broom. He's into everything with his flashlight."

But Penny, curious, hurried her luncheon to follow them round. They were looking into everything. They even flashed their lights into the water of the flower bowls and sniffed to make sure it was fresh. Their flashlights swept the floor boards and up the corners of each

room to the ceilings, searched the top of wardrobes and cupboards, behind books in the bookcases. And, as Delfina had said, the new man was a veritable new broom. He exhausted even Penny's interest. She returned to her chair under the mango.

The *ajudantes* had hardly left by the back gates when Wythe strolled in the Casa gates. As he dropped down on the grass beside her he pulled *Fouché* out of his pocket.

"I've tested pages of this cursed book with every kind of dope I can think of for invisible writing. No luck. I'm afraid if any message is hidden in it it's in code, and that's beyond me. In books and movies underlined words or dots always give the mastermind a clue. There isn't a mark in this opus that I can see."

"Give it up," Penny suggested, holding out her hand for it.

"Mind if take it home over the week end? I'd like to read it. From pages I've skimmed it's interesting."

Penny opened her lips to protest. Thought better of it.

Delfina appeared as he spoke, bearing a tray with two tiny cups of coffee.

"Good for you, Delfina!" he exclaimed. "You think of everything, don't you?"

"I think something queer is happening," she declared darkly. "I bring the coffee as an excuse. Miss Penny, two more *ajudantes* are here to go through the house."

"Let them go," Wythe advised. "They come every week, don't they?"

"But two of them have just finished taking the house apart," Penny explained. "They left just before you arrived."

"That's not all," Delfina informed them. "Miss Penny, one of these new *ajudantes* is that fellow who was here Thursday night. I'm sure. He wears dark glasses—"

"Mukerji!"

"Where are they now?" Wythe asked.

"In the kitchen. I didn't tell them others were here this noon—"

"These chaps must have seen the yellow flag stuck in the north gate," Wythe suggested. "That means *mata-mosquitos* are inside. They probably figured since the mosquito killers had come so late—they don't work on Saturday afternoons—the

ajudantes wouldn't be around until Monday. Let them go through the house, Delfina. Why not?"

"But why?" protested Penny. "It's been done once."

"Well, if one is Mukerji he might as well learn now that what he's looking for isn't here." Wythe touched his pocket carelessly. "Then perhaps he'll leave you alone."

"All right, Delfina, let them go," Penny said. "In a minute I'll come in."

A few minutes later she did go in, returning the coffee cups.

"They're in your room now," Delfina told her. "So are your sunglasses. You'll need them." She led the way to get them.

One man in a blue uniform was switching a flashlight up a corner of her bedroom wall. The other was not visible. Delfina, picking up Penny's sunglasses from her dressing table, rolled an eye toward the bathroom as she held them to the light.

"They're dusty. I'll wash them."

Penny followed her to see the second man on his knees before the shower booth, his head hidden by the tiled shower wall.

"*Boa tarde*," Penny said in her best and practically only Portuguese, strolling over.

The ajudante's head turned slightly and a muffled "*Boa tarde*" answered her. Then he leaned farther in to focus his flash on the drain in the corner. Nothing about him suggested her first and last English pupil, but she could recognize a narrow ear lobe when she saw it again.

Wythe looked thoughtful when she returned to her chair and verified Delfina's suspicions. "I was being nonchalant for Delfina's benefit," he said. "Look here, this means something—two sets of men, both in official uniforms. What were the first mata-mosquitos and ajudantes like, by the way?"

"Bona fide, apparently. Delfina knew them all—No, she didn't. One was new."

"You don't suppose the police are in this picture somewhere?" Wythe pulled up some blades of grass, sifted them through his fingers, threw them away. "Let's forget it. I came up to talk about something else. Don't you think you should have some young women friends here?"

Penny shook her head. "Let's wait a little. It's lovely out here and quiet, and I can use a lot of it now I'm used to it." Although Mart's warning—"If you won't promise to stay inside your own hedge I'll park these guardians here day and night"—rang in her ears, she nodded toward the mountains. "I love Brazil, don't you? I could never tire of those mountains."

"I'd give my life to be out of it!" The words evidently burst from Wythe of their own power, yet even the force behind them could not change the quiet level of his voice. He jumped up, took a step or two away, and returned.

"Do you know what I think I'll do? I've had my resignation written out for two months. I think I'll use this beautiful afternoon to present it to Cock."

"Wythe! You can't do that. At least wait for Paul—"

"Paul knows the laboratories are set up and functioning. That chemists to carry on the routine we're doing now are a dime a dozen. I think he wonders why I've stayed this long. There go your ajudantes. I'll follow their example—perhaps get look at that Mukerji. *Até logo*. See you Monday."

But a few hours later, as Delfina was preparing dinner, Wythe telephoned. Penny learned then that something could make him raise the level of his voice.

"Is José there?" The words rang in her ears. "Drop everything and have him bring you here. I'll feed you. And bring Delfina too. We'll need her."

ANTONIETTA, his colored maid, moving about a dining room off the foyer, was regarding them with undisguised interest.

"I got you up here to see the view really," he said to Penny. "The moon's almost full. And I lured Delfina under false pretenses too. Antonietta is leaving at eight for the country to stay with her son till Monday. I thought Delfina might help her out so that she can get away."

If his words were noncommittal, his eyes were not. They fairly shouted that something important had happened.

"Come, see my terrace," he invited when Delfina disappeared with Antonietta.

Once on the terrace Penny forgot him and his news. Above them curved the night sky, stars dimming before the rising moon. Below, all around, lay the city, a universe itself ablaze with millions of small suns. Between them and the harbor stretched a wide parkway, its winding marine drive arched with trees and aisled with lights.

To their left, guarded by a majestic row of palms, stood Gloria Church, solemn and dark. To their right, Gloria Hotel, bursting with light. Cars came and went before its doors, bringing Saturday-night diners. Beyond the marine drive, encircled by city and mountains, lay the harbor, the lights of Rio and of Niteroi pouring down and down into motionless waters. Behind everything rolled range on range, the ebony silhouettes of the Organs.

As she moved round the terrace to gaze at the radiant statue of Christ dominating the scene from the summit of Corcovado, the highest peak, Wythe came to stand beside her. "We're going to celebrate—"

"Don't tell me Mr. Cochrane accepted your resignation!"

His usually smooth forehead creased in a dark frown. "No. I found him in a bad moment. Something was eating him, and he took it out on me."

Terrace lights snapping on startled them. They turned round to see Antonietta approaching, cocktails and canapés on a tray.

"No, we're celebrating your first visit here," Wythe substituted.

As Antonietta disappeared he said significantly. "You may call it luck or coincidence, but I hope you'll call it deduction. That's what it was—partly."

"What was?"

"Wait. I must begin at the beginning. And the beginning is that I brought that book of yours home with me this afternoon. Going through it as often as I had, I'd read bits that made me want more. I stretched out on my couch downstairs and read till Chapter IV stopped me. Me, personally, I mean. For it begins with one of the best essays on exile I've ever read. Or perhaps it only seemed so because I feel exiled down here and it

meant something personal to me."

He laughed a little, embarrassed at revealing his feeling about it.

"Read it now," she urged as he drew the book from his pocket. Here was another Wythe and she was interested again.

"Oh, the essay isn't the point now. It's merely the medium. I'll just skim a few sentences to show you what started me on the road to discovery."

He switched on a light and, standing under it, read slowly, his voice tingling with excitement as he went on:

"Has anyone ever composed a hymn of exile? Has any poet ever sung the glory of this power that molds destinies, which uplifts those who have been cast down, which under the harsh stresses of loneliness reassembles in new order the dispersed energies of the soul? . . . The most notable messages have been delivered from exile. . . . Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Luther, Dante, Nietzsche. . . . Even in the lower spheres of life, a temporary exclusion . . . gives a new freshness of vision. . . ."

Wythe closed the book and looked up. "That probably ruins the essay for you."

"No, it makes me wish I'd read the book on the boat coming down."

"I wish I'd read it sooner too. I didn't want to leave my work in New York. I was onto something big, but poor men can't choose. That's not important now. I didn't read further. In fact, I fell asleep, with the book open on my chest, thinking about that essay."

"When I woke up my living room was as black as night. Antonietta had come in and, seeing me asleep, had drawn the curtains. Not fully awake, I lay there thinking about the essay. It occurred to me that what exile had done for Moses, Buddha, and the rest had done for men in our own time—Hitler, Lenin, Stalin—was probably doing right now for men, voluntarily or not, in exile."

"That gave me an idea. Perhaps we were hearing from one of them now. Perhaps that little essay with its significant phrases was an arrow." Wythe passed the book to Penny, open at the essay. "Look at it."

She looked but could only see lines of black type on a white page.

"Keep on looking." He snapped off the terrace lights.

Under the pergola it was not as black as night, but it was dark. As Penny looked a faint glow began to develop on the page before her. Startled, she peered closely. The glow broke up into lines alternating with the black lines of type.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"I don't know." Wythe took the book from her and pushed it down securely in his pocket. "Some new trick ink possibly. But those lines of broken light you saw are words—Portuguese words. That's why I asked you to bring Delfina. We may need help."

"You haven't read it!"

"Just the first word or two. You started all this, you know. I thought you'd like me to wait till we could read it together."

A bell rang softly below as he spoke.

"I suppose we must go down." He rose reluctantly. "But that's what I saw when I picked up the book in the dark this afternoon. This is the message our friends are playing hide-and-seek to get."

XVI

WYTHE in the dark dining room called off letter by letter the message written in light between the lines of the essay. Delfina, beside him, assisted occasionally. Sitting alone beside a reading lamp in the adjoining living room, Penny wrote each letter down.

The message was brief. When they reached the end they spread Penny's papers on the dining-room table. Wythe wrote out a condensed translation:

The stone is genuine—712.3 carats. Before cutting, value approximately \$450,000. After, could attain one to one and a half million. Could be cut as one jewel but more practical to divide into fifteen or more. Much expert study needed to determine number and size of finished gems.

Penny and Wythe looked from the rough English words to one another, each with his own bewilderment. Delfina behind them uneasily eyed doors and windows.

"A million-dollar diamond!" Wythe paced a step or two, turned back to look at Penny oddly. "Did you know that—

when you brought it down?"

Penny had sunk into a chair. Her face had lost all color.

Delfina came to her. "Come home, Miss Penny," she urged. Turning stern eyes on Wythe, she added, "You should burn those papers, Dr. Wythe. I don't know what they mean, but it isn't good."

"No. Perhaps not." He spoke gravely, but Penny felt his pleasure in having deciphered the message. Yet she could find no significance in it. Surely those facts and figures were nothing to alarm Dr. Attilio, interest Mr. Cochrane. Couldn't anyone who had the diamond get such information at any time? More important, she felt, was the necessity to get the book itself without rousing Wythe to questions and suspicions.

She wasn't going to get it, she realized, when she heard him speaking.

"If it weren't Saturday I'd take everything over to my bank," he was saying. "That's out, so I think we'll follow Delfina's advice and burn these papers, at least. The book is enough. And we don't want your handwriting mixed up in this, Penny. You burn these in something, Delfina. I'll take steps about the book."

While Delfina burned the papers one at a time in a metal tray Wythe did take steps. With a knife he carefully cut out the type block of the essay on exile, leaving the margins of the page as they were.

Penny watched attentively. His long fingers, accustomed to working with exactitude in his laboratories, moved precisely and without pause until the rectangle was removed. Then he took out his notebook to place it between the leaves.

"No. That won't do. The book remains to tell the tale."

He hurried into the living room, moving about there from bookshelves to tables, opening books and putting them down. At last a satisfied exclamation told them he had found what he wanted.

He returned with a book and laid it on the table beside *Fouché*. *Introduction to Argentina*, Penny read on its blue jacket.

"What has the Argentine to do with the message?" she asked as he hunted in a table drawer for something.

He came back with a roll of very narrow gummed tissue. "This," he told her, opening the books side by side. "*Fouché*

and *Argentina* both have the same page size. Their type blocks are the same measure and kind. It will be a good trick if I can do it."

In the same way he had removed the type block from *Fouché* he removed a type block from the book on the Argentine. Then with infinitely careful fingers he reversed the blocks, inserting and gumming the essay on exile into *Introduction to Argentina* and the page from *Argentina* into *Fouché*.

"See if you can find it," he said when he had finished. Penny could, of course, because her fingers felt for the tell-tale tape. To anyone ignorant of the substitution, however, discovery would be difficult unless he read the two books through. Even then, reading in sun or lamplight, he could not have found the message *Introduction to Argentina* now contained.

Wythe placed *Fouché* on the little table beside the couch with other books he had been reading there. *Introduction to Argentina* he returned to its former place on a shelf.

"Really a mastermind," Penny applauded.

"They won't stand rough treatment, but they'll hold till Monday or till we can decide what to do next."

Penny's lips quirked at that "we."

"Shall we go up on the terrace to do it?" he suggested.

If he intended to tell her on the terrace what his ideas were he was defeated. For one reason because Delfina followed close on their heels, her determination not to be left alone with those books unmistakable. For another, the world appeared to have gone mad in their absence. Angry red moons were streaming across the sky, so many of them that the heavens seemed to be changing position.

"What's happening?" Penny cried.

Delfina laughed suddenly, an odd but welcome sound after the tension of the last two hours.

"Tonight is São João's Eve, Miss Penny. Those are balloons sent up by young men. They think if their balloon goes up safely it will reach São João—"

"Saint John," Wythe murmured.

"—in the sky and he will make the girl they want to marry say yes. If it

falls, then they must wait another year. See? They are going up everywhere."

They were. From Niteroi across the harbor they mounted steadily to rush toward Rio on the night wind. From below and behind the apartment house balloons were climbing above the trees to speed away toward the mountains.

But many young men were doomed to disappointment, Penny thought, as some quivered in mid-air, tipped, and fell back in burning fragments to the earth. And Rio, she thought less happily, would be in ashes by morning.

Faint cries of children floated up from below. "They're calling, 'Cae, cae, balão,'" Delfina explained. "'Fall down, balloon.' They want to get them for themselves."

"What fun! What else do they do tonight?" Penny turned with relief from thought of the diamond and the message.

"Burn fires and eat. Everyone does that for the next two weeks. Many saints' days come now, and children don't go to school till they are over. But tonight is the best night for balloons."

"Want to forget what we came up to talk about and go round?" Wythe asked. "We might find a balloon or two going up."

"Let's! I'd like to forget forever."

Delfina left with José in the Olivers' car for the Casa. Shortly Wythe and Penny were driving through twisting streets, searching for balloons and fires as eagerly as if they, too, were Brazilian youngsters freed from school for two weeks.

Balloons continued to rise and drift or fall above them, but nowhere could they find one going up. Here and there up dark lanes or in open fields they glimpsed silhouettes of family or neighborhood parties gathered about bonfires.

"The show seems to be over," Wythe said ruefully. "Now if I can find out where we are—"

As he spoke he turned into a street where a great open field was bright with lights and the glow of fires. From the windows of houses overlooking it, people hung out to watch. Hundreds more moved about the field itself.

They parked Wythe's car and strolled over. One glow was a bonfire, burning none too enthusiastically through old

boards. A small glow was a fruit crate standing on end, lined with pink tissue paper and lighted with bits of candle to reveal a colored lithograph of the Christ child. That was all Wythe and Penny could see. Perhaps little girls silent in a row before it saw more.

The brightest glow lighted a platform where a young Negro was singing carnival songs to the accompaniment of a tinny banjo. Here the crowd was larger, pressing closely round it to see and hear.

"Let's go," Wythe murmured suddenly in Penny's ear. When they were clear of the crowd he added, "I wish I could be sure it was a pickpocket who went over me. That boy was an expert."

IN the car Wythe looked at Penny regretfully. "Hasn't been much of an evening, has it? Would it help if we went up Santa Theresa and looked down from there? It's an interesting old residence section high on a mountain, and its view of the city is something!"

It was an interesting section of steep, cobbled streets, mounting between high stone walls. Stone stairways led upward to large old homes deep in trees. Frequently Wythe stopped for breath-taking glimpses of moonlit city and sea and balloons by the score sailing across the sky.

"Hold tight!" he exclaimed unexpectedly. "We'll make this evening perfect yet. We'll go up corcovado. Begin polishing up your adjectives."

He drove steadily, winding back and forth on the hairpin turns, mounting higher and higher. The towering statue of Christ on the summit, luminous in the blast of brilliant floodlights, appeared and disappeared, each glimpse more impressive than the last.

At length they came out on a large cobbled clearing enclosed by a dark railway station and the rim of dark forest.

"This is Paineiras, about halfway up," he explained. "I thought we could get the cable car here. At least I thought it ran till midnight."

"Is it far to the statue? Can't we walk?"

He looked dubiously at her long thin dinner dress and high-heeled green silk slippers. "Could you walk? There is

a road for cars, but it's closed at night. Too dangerous."

Penny jumped out to stand beside him. "Of course I can walk."

But a short distance up the road a heavy bar stopped their way. Moved, stubbornly perhaps, to do something determined by themselves instead of by circumstances imposed by others, they stooped under the bar and went on. For the first half-hour they stopped frequently to gaze at the widening world below. After that they moved steadily to keep warm.

Once or twice Penny turned round, thinking she heard a car on the road below, or with the sensation of someone near them. Wythe reassured her.

"There isn't a soul for miles. Few people come up here at night. There are just two fools in this whole country, Penny—you and I."

Up and up they climbed and round and round as the road zigzagged about the mountain. Wythe assured her Corcovado was less than twenty-five hundred feet in height, but on high-heeled evening slippers, using unaccustomed muscles, distance, to Penny, stretched like rubber into miles and miles.

Breathless, her knees trembling, her slippers cutting her heels, she climbed silently, inwardly praying to the *Christo*, always in sight now, to be allowed to lie down and die. Wythe, however, seemed as fresh as when they started, so she pumped herself on and on.

At last they reached steps terraced in stone. The statue, now just above them, was an enormous eye-inspiring figure, standing on a base formed by a white stone structure.

Unexpectedly the steps ended at a dirt clearing where a little wooden shed and a few overturned wheelbarrows offered their view for the one they had struggled to see. But Wythe's blood was up now.

"Wait here. I'll find a way."

Penny waited, shivering in the biting wind. Then shivering again as she heard far below the throb of a climbing car.

"Wythe!" she called.

"Here I am," he answered. "And here's a place to climb up. To the left, Penny."

She ran across the rough ground, but

before she could speak he had caught her arm and pulled her up beside him.

"Just a few rough spots here. Then the rest is easy."

"But wait!" she gasped. "A car's coming up, following us. Listen!"

He whirled round to face back down the mountain, listening. There wasn't a sound save the whine of the wind whistling about the statue.

Then they thought no more of cars. Up more steps, past a many-sided pavilion, patronized by bats at that hour, was the statue and the view at last.

White and stern, designed with the greatest economy of line and tremendous power, the *Christo*, formed by thousands of tiny triangles of stone into a great mosaic, reduced them and their affairs to less than the dust whirling about them.

It stood in a circle of powerful lights, dominating city and sea. They looked a long time into the carved face, the outstretched arms, the long, almost fluid folds of the robe falling straight to naked feet.

Then silently they followed the observation platform to the end to gaze on the world before them. Perhaps somewhere else a panorama offered a more magnificent beauty, Penny thought, but on the summit of Corcovado on a night of full moon, she could not imagine it.

At their feet lay the entire city of Rio. Millions of lights like a net of gold flung over valleys and hill slopes were bordered on one side by the endless reaches of the Atlantic and on all the others by the interwoven peaks of the mountains.

Harbor and lakes glimmered beneath the net. Royal palms soared out of it. Picturesque islands in the harbor and off the ivory line of beaches rose dark and mysterious. Ships lying at anchor might have been gold-tipped feathers drifted there from some legendary bird. Above everything arched the night sky and the immensities of space, dwarfing a city of almost two million people to the dimensions of a toy and folding them in a singing silence of wonder and awe.

For Wythe and Penny that silence suddenly was ripped away. From below rose the horrible scream of a man in agony and fear. Fell. Rose again.

Crash after crash followed as something heavy and large hurtled down the moun-

tainside, knocking into boulders, tearing away trees, leaving behind a trail of thundering echoes.

They stopped thinking, stopped breathing. Wordless, motionless, helpless, they listened and strained to look down into that deep valley, black with forests.

Sounds became fewer and fainter. Then did not come at all. In a silence that now seemed to explode in their ears they stood fixed to the ground like the statue above them.

After a time something glowed far down the slope. Grew brighter. Stronger. Soon they could see tongues of flames licking this way and that.

SOMEHOW they returned down the mountain as they had gone up. They passed in silence through alternate stretches of moonlight and shadows. Penny's slippers carved their edges into her feet. Her thin wrap was no protection. But nothing mattered except to reach Wythe's car.

They never reached Wythe's car. They never saw it again.

Though the spot on the cobbled square where he had parked it was filled with moonlight sparkling on broken glass, to them it was empty.

Wythe walked about for a moment while she gazed at the place where the car had stood, as if her looking could bring it back.

"I'm afraid I exaggerated when I told you there were two fools in this country," he said, coming back to her. "They're all rolled into one. And that one is me. Someone's here."

Out of the darkness a little distance down the road a square, short figure was taking form. And then another, short, too, but with a familiar little swagger. Delfina and José!

Their faces in the moonlight were almost white. As they drew nearer they tried to smile, but only the corners of their lips moved. Delfina found four words: "We've got the car."

Silently Penny and Wythe followed them down the road. In a little clearing off a side road José had concealed the Olivers' car. They sank down on the back seat, still speechless.

José never spoke, though the back of his head was eloquent as he guided the car swiftly round the curves. But Delfina

spoke for both of them. Turning on Penny and Wythe with blazing eyes, she spared no words.

"You might have been killed," she concluded at last. "Those men were hunting for you."

"Men! What men?" Wythe demanded.

"The men in the car that followed you—that stole your car."

"I think we'd better wait until we reach my apartment to get this story straight," he interrupted. "And thanks for the scolding, Delfina. It was a peach. I'll remember it all my life."

And I'll remember all my life, Penny thought, this little Brazilian chauffeur and Delfina who, scared to death, stayed by us on that lonely mountain.

José out of the way in Antonietta's room, asleep almost before he reached the door, Wythe and Penny welcomed the dinner they had scorned a few hours before and listened to Delfina.

"We started home," she began, "then we came back. José told me about a car standing at the foot of Dr. Wythe's street with two men in it. He said it came soon after you went up to Dr. Wythe's apartment, Miss Penny. And it stayed there all the time he was waiting for you. I saw it, too, when we went down. I wasn't sure, but I thought one of the men was Mukerji."

"So I told José to go back. But we were too late. Dr. Wythe's car was just coming out of the street. Before we could reach you the car with the two men started after you. So we went, too. We could have lost you many times. You turned so often. But that car did not lose you, and we stayed behind it."

"When you stopped at the place where the bonfire was they stopped, too. One of the men followed you over to the bonfire. José was going to go. Then something else happened."

Delfina stopped, apparently to look over her words. She was very proud of her English, and this was her moment to display it.

"A motorcycle came. A man in a uniform was on it. He stopped at Dr. Wythe's. Then he took something out of his pocket and opened the door and went inside. Many people wanted to come to see. He made them go away."

He was more than a policeman. Nobody came close. He was standing near your car when you came back."

"Why didn't you or José tell us then?" Penny asked.

"Because that motorcycle man was there. We thought you would stop somewhere and we could tell you."

"Quite right," Wythe encouraged when she paused, embarrassed. "And then?"

"When you drove away the men in the car did, too. So we followed again."

"And I suppose the motorcycle chap brought up the rear," Wythe commented dryly. "Quite a procession." He did not look at Penny, nor she at him.

"No. The motorcycle man went back," literal Delfina assured him. "I watched him go. We followed you and the other car up to Santa Theresa. When you started up the road to Paineiras the other car stopped. We went on down toward Sylvestre as if we was—were—just riding."

"We did not know what to do. We knew you would not want police. And to come back to the Fabrica for Mr. Mart or someone would take two, maybe three hours."

"Right again," Wythe applauded.

Delfina warmed with pleasure.

"When we came back to the Paineiras road the car with the men was not there. José heard a car going up the mountain. He said it was the one. So we went, too—after a little. Nobody was at Paineiras. Just your car. Dr. Wythe. José walked up the road a little. The bar was moved. So he said that car had gone up, and we could hear it sometimes."

"Then we did not know what to do as much as before. We did not think you would walk up to the statue and Miss Penny dressed like that. So José put the car in a dark place and we waited. We thought you would hear that car coming and go out of sight and then come down. But you didn't come. Then, after a long time, we heard a terrible scream and a noise. Did you hear it? We—we thought it was you."

Delfina stopped. Her eyes were large and shadowed again with fear. Penny tried to find words but could not. Neither could Wythe.

"Soon a man from that car came down

the hill. He was running. He broke the window in Dr. Wythe's car and got in and went away. José and I didn't do anything. We sat still. We thought if you came down we would take you home. And if you didn't come down we would be there in the morning when the stationmen came. We would get them to go with us for you. That's all."

Delfina's flat voice trailed off into silence. She looked tired, more tired than Penny felt, which was as tired as all the tired people in the world.

Wythe and Penny looked at one another. What could they say or do that would mean anything in return for what Delfina and José had done?

"How much does Delfina know?" Wythe asked Penny. "Have you told her anything?"

Penny shook her head.

"Well, she's a leading lady now in whatever this is about. Suppose I tell her something of what we know, and she can cook up her own explanation for José."

Delfina never turned a hair as Wythe talked. Penny, listening, realized that Delfina accepted Wythe's confidence as a very real reward.

When he finished Delfina rose and went into the living room to the table where he had placed the copy of *Fouché*. "It's the book they want?" she asked, turning round.

"Yes," Wythe said.

"They have it then," she told him and smiled for the first time.

Wythe sprang for the table. *Fouché* was gone. He turned to the bookshelves. *Introduction to Argentina* was still there.

VIII

SUNRISE was flooding the eastern skies with color when José stopped the car before the veranda of the Casa. Slippers in her hands, Penny limped to bed. But physical, mental, and emotional aches permitted only light, fitful slumber throughout the morning and early afternoon.

At sound of her door opening cautiously she stirred and opened her eyes. But no bouncing powder puff pushed in to leap upon her bed. And the eyes that met hers certainly were not Delfina's.

They were pale eyes. And deadly intent. Madge Cochrane's! Before she could sit up the door closed, and she heard light footsteps receding hurriedly down the corridor to the kitchen.

Penelope forced her aching body erect and groped for robe and slippers. But the door opened again, to admit the Baroneza this time and a Delfina angry and concerned.

"Oh!" Penny groaned. "What a time to have callers. Have we a wheel chair, Delfina? I don't think I can walk—"

"She didn't come to call, Miss Penny. And she's gone now," Delfina assured her. "I wish the senhora was home. Mrs. Cochrane wouldn't dare think such things."

Penny sat down, aghast, "Delfina! Mrs. Cochrane wasn't looking for her husband again? Here!"

The maid nodded, then said more cheerfully, "But I don't think she'll come back. She felt awful when you saw her. And she looked awful, too, Miss Penny. She's going to be sick if she doesn't stop worrying."

Baroneza, however had no concern for Penny's aches and misgivings. A glorious day was made for walks, she implied, following Penny about, nudging her, barking, sitting up to beg with eyes and paws. At last pity moved Penny. She had neglected the little tyrant, she admitted guiltily.

In the soft light of the waning afternoon they set out. But before the Casa gates were reached Penny slipped off the Baroneza's leash. After Corcovado her feet simply could not stand the pace.

Like an arrow, the Baroneza sped down the hill to the high ground above the laboratories. Too late Penny saw that Mart had had the long grass burned over there on Saturday. By the time she arrived the dog's snowy coat was already black with grime, her plume a gray and clotted brush.

Wearily she watched while the excited Baroness dashed back and forth after butterflies or, diverted by one or another of the strange objects the fire had revealed, investigated with a busy nose. Her own curiosity aroused, Penny moved gingerly over the burned field to investigate, too.

One rounded little object proved to be a brick oven, its iron door hanging

loose on a single pin. Another appeared to be an old grave, placed between the trunks of three coco palms. About four feet square, with three stone walls a foot high and a fourth twice that, it had obviously been neglected for years. Inside the little walls lay a motley collection of old iron scrap, broken glass, and bits of wood, drifted over with singed leaves and grass. More interesting were the low guava, acacia, and cashew trees now standing free of high grass. Strangely shaped seed pods and, occasionally, small pouch-shaped birds' nests dangled from frail twigs.

After a time she missed the Baroneza, but in the quiet of the deserted grounds, placid now in the thinning light of the sun, she could hear her. Penny looked about uneasily. The Baroneza was not barking; rather, emitting a curious assortment of whines and growls.

Following the sounds, she arrived at the rim of the plateau above the laboratories. Below her Baroneza was running back and forth before their own varnished doors. Sniffing. Jumping against them. Whining, growling.

Still dull from her experience on Corcovado, Penny watched idly for a time. Through a high window she could see the sunlight falling across the tops of file cases lining the wall between office and laboratories.

Something about their position startled her alert. They were not straight as she had seen them on Friday, but pulled out from the wall in a disorderly slant.

Then she was down beside the Baroneza, alternately pounding on the doors and listening. No sound or movement answered her. Yet someone must be inside or the Baroneza would have passed right by. And the only one who could be there on Sunday was Wythe.

From that level the windows were high above her head. Running round to the back of the building, she found a large empty crate. By pulling and pushing she managed to propel it to a side window of the office and climbed up.

Wythe was not inside. Neither was this his orderly office. Every drawer of every file was pulled out, and papers by deep on the floor. Desk drawers were turned upside down on top of them.

Twisted across the corner of the north wall was the bookcase. Its books, too, were sprawled in tumbled heaps on the floor, as if someone had looked at each one, then hurled it down.

As she gazed, stupefied, at the havoc some papers that had slipped down before the inner doors to the laboratories stung her eyes. A dark stain spread among them.

"Wythe! Wythe!" she screamed and pounded idiotically on the window. Only the derisive hoot of an engine pulling a freight train into the hills answered her.

Jumping down, she tugged the crate to the next window to look into the main laboratory. There the chaos was indescribable. Tables and cabinets were bare, their contents a littered mass of broken glass, powders, and apparatus on the floor.

But her eyes did not linger there. They went to the body of a man lying face down just inside the doors to Wythe's office. Penelope's face darkened with incredulity, then horrified recognition. Mr. Cochrane! There was no mistaking that bald head, the plump, smooth hands, a diamond gleaming dully on one.

Sobbing in reaction and horror, she jumped down and fled for the Casa, the Baroneza close to her heels. The realization as she ran that the watchman would begin his rounds at six gave wings to her feet. It was already nearly five.

"Get Wythe out here," she cried as Delfina appeared in the kitchen door. "Tell him to go straight to the laboratories."

WHEN the first watchman came round a little after six Wythe and Penny were standing in the laboratories pathway, watching the sunset. They returned his polite "*Boa tarde*" as politely. Assured by Wythe's presence that all was well with the building, he passed on up the pavement to the factories.

They watched until he was safely on his way, then turned slowly to the varnished doors. Without a word Wythe unlocked them and stepped inside. Penny followed.

The light was dim now, and the chaos on the floor a mass of gray-and-black shadows. When Wythe flashed on the lights

he stood beside the switch, his eyes darkening.

He had worked more than a year to build these laboratories and start them functioning, Penny thought, watching him. But if he was thinking that he said nothing of it. When he spoke his voice was as quiet as ever.

"I'm going to open those doors."

"I'm staying."

Stepping across papers and desk drawers, he opened the doors a little, swung them wide. Penny followed his glance to the floor.

No crumpled body lay there. No dark stain spread over the floor. Only a single paper near the doors showed one corner dimly red. Beyond them the confusion of twisted equipment and broken glass glinted here and there in the light from the office.

Penny gasped, but Wythe made no sound. He stood rigidly erect, his eyes fixed on the floor. Then slowly, stiffly, like a man walking in his sleep, he moved down the room. He did not speak, did not touch anything but the curtains at the windows which he closed one by one.

After a moment Penny turned away and sat down in his chair behind his desk in the office. She could not bear to watch him.

Her own mind was numb. Yet beneath it somehow a mass of thoughts was whirling—phrases, names, bits of ideas, memories. They moved fantastically in and out, combining ridiculously, formed at last into a meaningless sequence—"A two-o'clock man, a two-o'clock man." Two o'clock! She repeated the phrase idly, then shook herself back to reality.

Two days before at two o'clock she had sat at this desk looking at two pieces of glass lying side by side, the little Unprotecting Arm between them.

"Wythe!" she cried.

He appeared in the doorway, the laboratories dark now behind him. In the strong office light, his face was gray and ridged with deeper gray lines across his forehead.

She hesitated, then as he continued to question her silently she asked. "The samples of glass, the Unprotecting Arm—where are they?"

"Safe in a lockbox in my bank down-

town. I took them in Friday after I showed them to you. Why?"

"I thought whoever did this might have learned about them somehow—might know what we know about that man on the Casa steps."

He shook his head. "We're the only ones who could know that. No, I think it is the message they are hunting."

Moving round the wreckage to the desk, he twisted *Introduction to Argentina* from his pocket and laid it before her.

"What's that for? I mean, why did you bring it here?"

"I'm expecting visitors again in my apartment." His lips twisted wryly. "I thought it might be safe here till morning. It seems I am mistaken."

Snapping the office window curtains together on their rods, he picked up the book. "Let's go. Nothing more we can do here."

"Leave all this? Can't we—?"

"No, we can't." His voice was brittle.

"Well, I can." Penny jumped up.

"I'm going to put those books back and pick up the papers, at least."

She plunged in, hoping desperately he would help her. Her laboratory hadn't been destroyed, but she knew something of what he felt. For hours, it seemed, she picked up books at random, smoothed their pages, and placed them on shelves in the double silence of Sunday evening and his remoteness.

"You're mixing them up," he said, suddenly beside her. "You straighten them out and give them to me. I'll put them in place."

Neither of them thought of dinner or Delfina. Neither of them mentioned the stain on the floor. Wythe worked silently while Penny chattered on and on about anything that came into her head. As they were picking up the last papers she remembered her discoveries in the burned grass.

"You must see this grave," she babbled brightly. "It must be very old. It's like nothing I've ever seen before. Come now. It's only a step from the laboratories."

Except for the lights on the hills and along the Fabrica pavement the night was as black as velvet when they opened the doors.

"Going to rain," Wythe said. "Wait.

"I'll get a flash—if there is one."

He turned back while she applauded her own skill as a psychologist. His voice was back to normal. He moved less like a man in a nightmare.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked when he returned. "After ten. Hungry? Look here, isn't this the night I invited you to dinner?"

"You gave it to me last night, remember? Then showed me Corcovado. I'll reverse it tonight. Show you the grave, then feed you."

"This works, anyway," he said, snapping on the flash.

"Oh, you'll probably find a lot of salvage in the morning," she assured him as they climbed the steps cut in the bank to the plateau.

At the top he stopped her, a hand on her arm, the flash dark. "Hear anything?"

She listened. "Not a sound. Why?"

He did not answer for a moment. When he did his voice was low, hesitant. "This is as safe a place as any to tell you—" She felt his hand grow hard on her arm. "If I should tell you."

That familiar tremor of cold ran over Penny. "Wythe," she whispered, "do you know who—?"

"No. I don't know. Remember that, Penny. But perhaps you should know I came out to the laboratories early this afternoon—to work. Cock dropped in. He—was furiously angry about something—and he was looking for—for Mart."

Mart! Thought of that irascible red-head, of his contempt for Mr. Cochrane's methods rocked Penny. A meeting between those two—both angry—Another thought rocked her as drastically.

"Wythe," she whispered again. "Madge—his wife—was out here, too, looking for him."

"For Mart?"

"No, for her husband. She thought he was at the Casa—with me. Her eyes—they were terrible."

Wythe's hand closed like a vise on her arm. "Let's see that grave and get out of this," he said clearly. Then, as they moved through the matted stubble, he added in a lower tone, "This thing's gone beyond us, Penny. The less we say

and know, the better. O.K.?"

"O.K." She turned in relief. "Here's the grave."

He swung the light on it, then up to her face. "This life is getting you." He smiled almost naturally at her. "That's no grave. It's a *tanque*—an old-fashioned Brazilian water trough. There were plenty of them around this section once. Paul saved as many of the old trees and things as he could in laying out these grounds. He likes them."

While he talked Wythe continued to hold the light on the old iron and glass in the trough. Suddenly he darkened it.

"That stuff looks as if it had been there for years, doesn't it? And probably will be for years more. No one on the property would ever think of cleaning out a place like this of his own accord."

"Probably not," Penny answered carelessly. "Shall we go now?"

"Wait a moment." He stooped down and touched the debris. "How about burying *Argentina* until tomorrow under this junk? No one would think of looking for it here in a thousand years."

"I wish it were a well. Then it wouldn't matter if they did. Go ahead."

Penny held the flash while he bent down to lift out some of the scrap.

"Turn it on. Hold it low." He exclaimed, "Look!"

She flashed on the light and looked. His hands, deep among crevices, were holding something solid. He took the flash and held it close to the mass.

"Look! This isn't old junk accumulated over years and lying here for more. It's one of the cleverest things I've ever seen. All these pieces are soldered together—they're solid."

"The Brazilian climate," Penny told him. "Everything grows here."

"Not this stuff," he declared, still peering into it. "It's an expert job, beautifully done. But why? Hold the flash again—low."

Stooping over the *tanque*, he slipped his fingers among the crevices, began to straighten slowly, lifting as he rose until he could lift no farther.

The solid mass of debris came up with him for a distance, then tipped back against the higher wall of the trough. Its founda-

tion was a heavy wooden base like a trap door.

Darkness, blacker than the night's, lay where it had been. Cautiously Wythe explored it with the flash. A steep stairway of narrow stone steps led downward.

"Not in a thousand years, eh?" Wythe laughed shortly. "I think, lady, I was about to place *Argentina* on the doorstep of the secret entrance to the *Fabrica* we have been looking for!"

HE added quickly. "I'll take you back to the Casa."

"And where are you going?"

"What do you think?"

"Not down those steps without me. If you go, so do I."

"Nonsense!" Wythe hesitated, said abruptly, "Come on, then. Why not? There's probably no danger at this time on Sunday night. And I may not get another chance as good."

He was descending as he spoke, his flashlight exploring the steps. Penny, her heart racing, was right behind him.

Perhaps a dozen steps down they came to solid ground and stood in a narrow passage, roughly paved and walled with stone. As far as the flash could penetrate the blackness, those walls ran on and on, glistening with moisture where light touched them. The air was dank with it and warm.

"Whew!" Wythe took of his coat and folded it over his arm. "Still with me?"

"Yes," Penny gasped and mentally thanked Corcovado for the flat-soled canvas sneakers she was wearing.

They moved on slowly, following the blur of light the flash threw before them. Suddenly it went dark.

"What's the matter?" Penny's teeth were chattering in spite of her effort to control them.

"Nothing," Wythe murmured. "I don't know how long this flash is good for. We may need it more later. Take my hand and keep touching the wall with your left. I will, too, on this side."

Guided by hands and feet, they crept ahead. *Introduction to Argentina*, in the pocket of Wythe's coat, nudging her occasionally, was the only variation in the monotony of dampish stone under her feet, dampish stone under her hand.

After a time she moved automatically, her mind returning to the wrecked laboratories and the problems they raised. They had told no one but Delfina anything of what had happened. It would be impossible to tell anyone what she had seen this afternoon, what they suspected. But something would have to be said to explain that destruction.

Her feet stopped, though her thoughts went on.

"What is it?"

"I—I don't know," she began. Then knew quickly. "My hand isn't touching wall. Just empty space."

He stood rigid a moment, pressing her hand in warning. "Hear anything?"

They might have been sealed in their graves; perhaps they were, Penny thought wildly. Out on the prairies and high in the Rockies she had known silence, but nothing like this entombment that enclosed them now.

Cautiously Wythe stooped, pulling her down with him, and snapped on the flash for an instant. There was no wall beside her because it had been cut away to form a rough arch that opened into a small stone-walled enclosure. Beyond the arch the wall continued again.

They peered into the room, the flashlight picking out rusted rings set among the stones of wall and floor.

"Nice little place—" Wythe's murmur stopped.

Words on Penelope's lips froze, too. For the moving light, circling the floor to the corner beside her, was resting on the body of Mr. Cochrane! It appeared to have been placed carefully on a bed of old clothes.

As the light of the flash moved over it she stood fixed. The light had picked up something else almost at her feet. A heavy gold blob on a length of slender black cane projected beyond the pile of clothing!

She had seen that cane swinging jauntily in the hand of the second Dr. Rosario on the decks of the *Paraguay*. She had seen it raised to strike!

"Wythe!" she tried to whisper, could not. Turning, she touched his arm. It was hard as stone. He appeared stone-like, too, and utterly unaware of her or where they were. He was looking at the

still face of the U.E. president.

"Wythe," she tried again. "That cane! I know whose it is. Those gray tweeds, too."

Still he did not answer, and she had to find an explanation for herself. It came—to turn her almost as rigid and still as Wythe.

She heard again his words by Pot Seven, explaining how a man's body had been destroyed there, heard him say, half to himself, "I wonder what became of the clothes."

The clothes were here. Then the man on the steps of the Casa, the man whose body had been destroyed, must have been the false Dr. Rosario!

As the knowledge formed in her mind Wythe swung round toward the archway. If Penny had not seized his hand so tightly he could not move without her; he would have left her there, she knew. Obviously he knew nothing, thought of nothing but reaching the man or men responsible for Emmett Cochrane's death.

In the passage, the flash dark again, she dug her toes into a crevice between the stones and brought him to a stop.

"Let's go back—get help, Wythe—the police—someone—"

"I'm going on."

"But we can't! We'll be killed—like—"

His hand, crushing hers, silenced her.

She heard then faint sounds in the passage. They came from the direction of the tanque entrance. Behind them. Rapid, padding little sounds.

The next moment Wythe had drawn her back through the archway, thrust her into a corner. He released her then, but she could feel him standing in front of her, tight as a coiled spring.

THE sounds died. Silence beat on their ears in roaring waves. The dank, warm air stifling.

At some change in Wythe she peered round at the archway. A pencil of light was creeping across the sunken stone threshold. It flicked, went out! Someone stood outside! Watching for them? Waiting?

A minute dragged by. Another. And another. Penny hardly breathed. Wythe made no sign of life whatever. Suddenly she began to shiver. The damp stone at

her back, she thought, was chilling her through and through. Wythe's hand groped back, found hers, and pressed it warningly.

Still they waited. No sound from the passage. No sound anywhere. She lost all sense of time. Lost even her power to feel, to think. Knew only a sensation that this was how it felt to be buried alive.

She came back to reality to find Wythe holding her, saying over and over in her ear, "Let's go, Penny. O.K.?"

She pressed his hand and they crept forward to the archway. To her amazement Wythe did not turn back toward the tanque. But she made no protest. None seemed worth making.

And so as if they had never paused at the little room with the rusted rings they went on up the passage. Shortly she knew they were climbing and steeply. Muscles that still ached from Corovado's road began to protest again.

Then their feet struck solid stone. A cautious reconnaissance with their hands revealed steps before them, leading almost straight up.

"Make it without the flash?" Wythe whispered.

Feeling their way, they moved up awkwardly. At last their hands plunged into space, and exploring, found a broad stone there. Standing on it, they listened while Wythe investigated the wall, found a door.

Their ears found something else. Voices on the other side of the door—two, possibly more. They appeared to be arguing or fighting. Once Penny thought she heard a woman's voice rise hysterically. Then one voice rose above the others.

Wythe, pressed closely against the door, made a sharp motion with the hand to which Penny clung. "Quiet!" he breathed, although she was already like a deaf-mute. To her astonishment he released her hand and began to beat the door with the flashlight, heedless of splintering glass.

"Dr. Attilio!" he shouted. "Sousa!"

Dr. Attilio! That hidden entrance and secret tunnel led to his door! Between relief and apprehension, while Wythe continued to shout and pound, she tried to penetrate the blackness behind them. But no pencil of light showed there. Could she have imagined it?

Silence was now as thick on the other side of the door as it had been in the tunnel. Shortly came the muffled sound of something heavy being moved, the clang of heavy metal. Finally a familiar and resonant voice called, "*Um momento!*"

XVIII

A CREAKING, then a sliver of light, then a glare. The heavy door swung inward, lifting as it went a tapestry that extended like a tent roof over their heads as they entered.

Dr. Attilio stood to one side, staring at them in amazement.

"Dr. Sloane! Wythe! Come in! Come in! And Miss Paget!"

He let the heavy door swing back, swung some sort of bolt into place, and dropped the tapestry. Wiping perspiration from his forehead, he turned to wave them to chairs, to sink into one himself.

"How did you find that old *subterraneo*?" he asked after a moment.

Dizzy from the warm air in the tunnel, dazzled by the lights, Penelope did not listen. Gradually the room became clear, a rich room lighted by several reading lamps of delicately hued fishskin and molded metals.

On three sides bookshelves alternating with old tapestries and wide, high windows mounted to a lofty ceiling of dark, shining wood, elaborately carved. Across from her in the fourth wall two polished doors led into other parts of the house. But her glance merely paused on them.

For between them a magnificent pair of gilded metal gates almost sealed a tall archway. Above them she could see the vaulted ceiling of a chapel and, between the openings in their design, the points of four candles twinkling far back in dimness.

As her eyes followed the baroque pattern of the gates upward she repressed the exclamation of recognition that rose to her lips. Above the arch a fragment of ancient and faded tapestry protected by glass was not in itself startling, but a single detail of its design riveted her attention. Worked in gold was the lower portion of a right arm; worked in silver, a tightly folded fist!

Her eyes remained on it as she listened

to Wythe explaining glibly, "I didn't find the *subterraneo*. Miss Paget came across it this afternoon while wandering over that high ground above the laboratories. She thought it was a grave, and to prove to her it was a tanque, I tried to lift out some junk accumulated there. Everything stuck together, naturally came up in one piece as I pulled. Below were steps, and here we are."

"So you are." Patting his forehead with his wadded handkerchief, Dr. Attilio smiled again. "And very welcome, too. May I offer you something to eat, to drink—a highball, wine perhaps?"

"Thank you, no." Wythe refused quickly for both of them. "We just left the Casa a moment to see the grave. If I don't get Miss Paget home soon Delfina will call out the Brazilian equivalent of the marines."

Penny listened with increasing incredulity and relief. This pleasantly chatting Wythe, smoking a cigarette as he talked, appeared completely at ease. He was not the same man at all who had entered the tunnel, stopped at that little room, come on, in spite of all she could do, to the door now hidden by tapestry.

Dr. Attilio, too, outwardly at least, was controlling admirably his surprise at their unusual manner of arrival. He leaned back against the deep carving of his chair, placed at one side of the gilded gates. His fine bearing, well-placed voice—everything about him, she thought—reflected generations of wealth and position and security.

But as she looked at him she saw perspiration start again on his forehead. He appeared alert, as if listening or conscious of someone or something near by. Puzzled, she turned to Wythe. He seemed unaware or unconcerned. His eyes were fixed in open interest on the gilded gates.

"You are fortunate to have found me in this room at this hour," Dr. Attilio was saying. "I doubt if anyone else in the house remembers that old *subterraneo*. I had almost forgotten it myself and had to lift each tapestry before I found the right one."

He turned to Penny. "You will be interested to know it was built before my grandfather's time. In those days Rio was far away. This was lonely country. It was necessary to have a way to leave

the house quickly or, if men were in the fields, to get them back."

"Are there just two entrances?" Wythe asked. "The one here, the other through that tanque?"

"That's all there are now. There were two more somewhere around the foot of this hill, but they were long ago effaced. Workmen's homes and shops stand on them now. I wouldn't even know where to look for them.

"You like that fragment of old tapestry above my chapel?" he asked, turning back to Penny. "It was brought to Brazil by my ancestor, Francisco de Sousa, a fidalgo of the Royal House of Portugal, in the seventeenth century. Sousas ever since have played important roles in Brazil, as a colony of Portugal, as a monarchy, and in the establishment of the Republic. But now we've turned to less spectacular fields—industry, science, even the arts."

Pride crept into his voice and manner. "That is our coat of arms. Of course, with the Republic, we think no more of titles in Brazil, I still treasure that bit of banner Francisco de Sousa brought with him more than two and a half centuries ago."

Dr. Attilio appeared now to be talking against time, as if he wished to keep them there. Embarrassed, too, by his reference to personal things, he turned to Wythe. "You must tell me about the *subterraneo*. I have not been in it since I was a child."

"We can't tell you much," Wythe assured him. "My flashlight wasn't too good and died after a short distance. I felt our way along with my hand on the wall to the right. It led us straight to your door."

Incredulity flashed in Dr. Attilio's face, was gone. "You came through that *subterraneo* in the dark! And you, Miss Penny, you were not afraid?"

"Paralyzed," she confessed. "But excited, too. I'd never been in a secret passage before."

SHE longed to ask questions. But Wythe's explanation had omitted so much she was afraid to risk a word. Glancing about for a cigarette, she found a silver box inviting her on the table at her elbow. She smiled as she opened it and paused before taking a cigarette

to look at the large rough piece of milky glass that stood beside it.

If Dr. Attilio had not been a glassman it would have been incongruous in a room so rich. But she knew what it represented. In India Paul had treasured another unlovely piece of glass—the first made in the glass factory he set up there.

"You discovered me in a—a private session with myself," Dr. Attilio was telling Wythe when she turned to listen again. "That is why you heard my voice in this room. You Americans flatter me so about my English that I take pains to keep it up to the mark."

He indicated a radio on a nearby bookshelf. "Every night about this time London broadcasts a forum on some phase of the war. I listen and answer with my own opinions. Perhaps you heard me voicing somewhat strong views—"

"No," Wythe told him quickly. "We could hear no words. I thought I recognized your voice and took a chance. And now I think I must take Penny back to the Casa."

Penny rose at once, sure he should. Nothing in the words or manner of either man could disturb anyone, but Wythe, she knew, was lying. She felt sure Dr. Attilio was, too. He had not been alone in that room. They had heard more than one voice speaking. Besides, her chair had been warm when she sank into it, and Dr. Attilio obviously preferred that large, high-backed, formal chair to a low, soft one.

"You must let me send you home, then," Dr. Attilio rose. As he moved toward a bell rope he added, "But first Dr. Sloane must put on his coat."

Wythe laughed and turned to the chest behind Penny where he had dropped it. "I'd forgotten all about it."

Dr. Attilio followed him to pick up the flashlight lying on top of it. Penny forced herself to remain quiet while Wythe leisurely shook himself into his coat. She understood now why he had splintered the light.

"You expected to read Miss Penny an appropriate sonnet at the grave?"

They both looked up to see Dr. Attilio's eyes fixed on the book in Wythe's pocket. Wythe laughed and patted *Introduction to Argentina*.

"I'd forgotten this, too. I brought it to the Casa to—settle an argument with Penny."

"And what book can do that?" Dr. Attilio extended his hand.

Wythe hesitated, drew it out. "You won't approve," he warned.

"*Introduction to Argentina!*" Dr. Attilio decidedly did not approve. "You live in Brazil and read about the Argentine, Dr. Sloane?"

Penny looked steadily at the Brazilian. "Doesn't the Good-Neighbor Policy work in South America, too?"

Dr. Attilio did not change expression, but his hand tightened on the book. "Of course, Miss Penny. With your permission, Wythe, I will read this book."

Wythe, studying Penny with hardly concealed surprise, and Dr. Attilio both turned at her stifled exclamations. She was facing the gilded gates, her eyes wide.

When first she had looked through those gates the points of four burning candles had been visible. Now two had vanished, then reappeared as the two on the opposite side blacked out. Against their tiny aura of light a dark silhouette was moving. Coming toward the gates.

"Penny!" Wythe shook her arm. "For heaven's sake, don't faint now. You're all right. If Dr. Attilio will ring for his car I'll have you home in ten minutes." The pressure on her arm tightened painfully.

Then his hand dropped and he swung around. They all did, startled into immobility. A thunderous knocking, though muffled, rolled through the room. It came from behind the tapestry that concealed the door to the tunnel.

DR. ATTILIO was the first to move. He turned to Wythe. "I did wrong to keep you here so long. Now I'm afraid it is too late." He lifted the tapestry, motioning to Wythe to hold it up for him. As he disappeared behind it Penny returned, shaken, to his chair.

Again she heard the clatter of the heavy bolt. Again the creaking protest as the massive door swung inward. Wythe, she could see, was alert and uneasy. The sight did not calm her own tingling nerves.

A moment more and Mart stepped into the room. The door closed, and Dr. Attilio appeared behind him. Wythe dropped the

tapestry and stepped back to Penny's chair, stooping over it to take a cigarette from the box beside her.

"Careful," he murmured. "Mart—in tunnel—behind us." He straightened to light his cigarette and stroll back to his chair.

Mart's glance went over them, but he said nothing. He continued to look about the room, then turned questioningly to Dr. Attilio.

"Sit down, Mart. You, too, Wythe." Dr. Attilio returned to his own chair, dabbing again at his forehead.

"Thanks, I'll stand if you don't mind. I think better on my feet." Mart stepped back against the tapestry, folded his arms across his chest, his right hand inside his coat.

"A telephone's on that chest behind Penny, Wythe. Hold the receiver when you get the connection so that I can talk. I've just discovered how Mario got those lamps out."

Wythe did not move. "So have we," he said coolly, "but that tunnel will still be there tomorrow."

"Mart, is this necessary?" Dr. Attilio protested. Before Mart's belligerency he shrugged. "Please do as he asks, Wythe."

While Wythe slowly dialed Penny sat motionless, her eyes fixed unseeingly on the gilded gates. In her amazement at Mart's arrival, the electricity he had brought into the room with him, she had forgotten the figure she had glimpsed behind them.

She was too accustomed now to Mart's inevitable appearance at crucial moments to be surprised to find him emerging from the tunnel. Or to realize it had been his flash that had thrown that pencil of light. But his manner now was amazing. He seemed to feel he held a leading role in this tangle in which they were all caught.

Certainly he was something more than an aggressive young man now. He was dangerous, and both Dr. Attilio and Wythe knew it!

Her eyes focused suddenly on the gates. Someone moved there. A white blur of hand was rising. In one of the openings a small dark ring appeared against the gold. As she watched, mesmerized, it disappeared to appear an instant later a little higher at a larger space. It was pointed straight at Mart, standing above

Wythe at the telephone behind her.

Afraid to cry a warning, she held her breath. Then her hand went out casually to the little table. Lingered over the cigarette box, flashed to close about the lump of glass.

The crash as it struck merged with the thunder of a shot. For a space that seemed timeless nothing moved in the room save a curling plume of smoke rising toward the ceiling and the soft plopping of glass fragments falling on the deep rug.

Mart leaped in front of her, his own revolver naked in his hand.

Dr. Attilio sprang up, too. He moved swiftly to the gates, turned a key in the large, anciently shaped lock. No sound came from behind them. The four candle points flickered steadily.

Wythe's level, cool voice sounded loud in the silence. "Here's your connection, Mart."

"Hang up," Mart ordered curtly. "I don't want it now."

Silently Wythe replaced the receiver, returned to his chair. Mart took another near him. Silence closed over the room.

Penny's fright turned to wonder. No one seemed concerned or even to remember that shot from the gates!

Her eyes traveling slowly from one face to another saw each intent on the same spot on the rug. But when she turned her own gaze there all she could see was scattered bits of glass.

Gradually one stood out from the rest. While the others sparkled with a thin translucence in the light of the tall lamps on either side of the gates, this appeared dull, hard, and heavy. Here and there a gray patina or frosting covered it, rendering it unresponsive to the light.

Or was it? As her eyes remained on it they caught deep within it a miniature fire. Tiny blue rays shot out from it in a radiance of pure light of its own.

Understanding ran over her in cold waves and up into her throat and face. The diamond! That dull blob as long and wide as an egg and at least half as thick must be Satan's Sixth Finger!

Unconsciously she leaned forward. Mart's voice thrust her back. "Sit still. Don't touch it."

He rose, eyes watchful, hand firm on

his revolver. Walking over, he scooped it up and into a pocket, returned as watchfully to his chair.

"Yes, Miss Penny," Dr. Attilio said heavily. "Satan's Sixth Finger. After a century of peace it returns to carry on its tradition of death." He appeared shaken by some emotion he fought to conceal. "Heaven forgive me, if sheltering it in this house——"

Sheltering! Penny's thought returned to that invisible figure sheltered in the chapel. She shivered. Wythe rose immediately.

"You should be home, Penny."

"Sit down, Sloane," Mart's voice was crisp, final. "If Penny can climb Corcovado she can sit in a chair for a few minutes."

"But why? What in——?"

"Sit down!"

HOURS seemed to pass as they sat in that pregnant silence, their eyes seldom straying now from those gilded gates. At last a car, several by the sound, stopped outside. Dr. Attilio rose, hesitated, then after a glance at Mart opened one of the smaller doors.

A blur of footsteps sounded in the corridor. A quick voice gave some order. Then a dark and slender man with hair so black and smooth it appeared lacquered on his head entered the room. Penny stiffened in recognition. The detective, the man who had rescued her—years ago, it seemed now—from Senhor Rodrigo!

He stopped just inside the door to look about. He recognized Dr. Attilio with a nod, Penny with another. Then he turned to Mart and Wythe.

Mart said, "We've met before, Lieutenant. Dr. Wythe Sloane, Lieutenant Diego Machado, of the Policia Central. Dr. Sloane is director of laboratories——"

"Of course. I know Dr. Sloane by reputation very well. Sit down, all of you." The lieutenant started to walk briskly into the room.

"Watch your step," Mart warned. "Broken glass."

Lieutenant Diego looked down, thrust some fragments aside with a foot, and turned to face them. "Who fired that shot? A telephone operator reported hearing one."

No one answered.

As he waited his eyes moved from face to face. Mart, Dr. Attilio, and Wythe looked at him steadily. Penny, blankly.

"Perhaps it was the crash of glass that was heard, Lieutenant," Dr. Attilio suggested quietly. "It could have sounded like a shot."

"Perhaps," Lieutenant Diego agreed dryly. "Since no one appears to have been hurt, we can discuss that later. While I'm here, Dr. Attilio, I'd like to see and discuss——"

A slow smile moved over Dr. Attilio's lips. "The matter has passed out of my hands, Lieutenant." His eyes indicated Mart.

"So? Then perhaps we three can discuss it. First, one question for Dr. Sloane, and then I think we can excuse him and Miss Paget. What is your interest in Satan's Sixth Finger, Dr. Sloane?"

Wythe smiled. "Perhaps I shouldn't say I have no interest in it. Certainly I'm curious to see so fabulous a stone. Outside of that, it means nothing to me—personally."

"Yet you have been more or less active in various events connected with it, haven't you?"

"I'd have to know specifically what you mean by 'events,'" Wythe's quiet voice countered. "Certainly several unexpected 'events' have occurred around here during the past week. I've been more or less an innocent bystander—even Boy Scout—trying to do what I could——"

"For one, Dr. Sloane, we have reason to think a man disappeared within the walls of Fabrica da Luz last Wednesday night. He was traced to the north gate. But has not been seen since. Can you tell us anything of him?"

"I know a man was murdered inside the Fabrica walls Wednesday night," Wythe assured him. "I can tell you everything about his murder—except his name."

At the immediate response in the detective's face Wythe amended hastily, "Not here—at this moment. Though with Miss Paget's aid I could tell you what happened. Or, if you will give me a little time to prepare some formulas, I can tell you—with proofs."

"Splendid. And you, Miss Paget, you will confirm Dr. Sloane's statement?"

Penny hesitated, plunged. "Yes, Lieu-

tenant Diego. And I know the name of the murdered man." As Wythe's amazed glance turned on her she added, "I—I just learned tonight——"

"Penny, you little fool!" Mart shouted. "If you hadn't saved my life tonight I'd——" His pause was angry too. "There was a shot fired, Lieutenant. It was meant for me. Miss Paget may not know who fired it, but if she hadn't thrown a chunk of glass at those gates you might have found me on the rug."

The detective spun round, but Dr. Attilio reached the gates before him, stood with his back to them.

"I have given sanctuary in my chapel to Mrs. Cochrane, Lieutenant Diego," he said firmly. "And with your permission I should like to give her the sanctuary of my home tonight. She is terrified, almost out of her mind with remorse. And she can harm no one else."

"Mrs. Cochrane!" Wythe sprang up, amazed and concerned.

"Dr. Attilio"—the detective spoke quickly—"you will see that Miss Paget is taken home at once, please. There are cars outside. Then return here."

"I'll take Miss Paget home," Wythe interrupted.

"One moment, Dr. Sloane. In Miss Paget and yourself I have found two valuable sources of information. As soon as we have arranged a time when I may see your proofs and formulas I am sending you to your home under escort also. Good night, Miss Paget. Unfortunately we must meet again."

Dr. Attilio's hand was already on Penny's arm, propelling her forward. She went without protest, grateful to get away. All she wanted now was to reach the Casa, to be alone to sort out the events that had piled up so madly upon her. Perhaps then she could discover the source of the terrible fear that gripped her.

The night air, fresh and cooled with rain, was soothing after the smoke-and-powder-scented room. She sank back against the seat of the police car in which Dr. Attilio placed her and filled her lungs. He talked in Portuguese with the police-chauffeur but said not a word to her. And she could make nothing of his inscrutable face as she was driven away.

When the brief, swift drive was over

and the car roaring up the hill to the Casa gates she saw with dismay that her longing for quiet was not to be gratified. The house was brightly lighted. From every window sounded the Baroneza's frenzied barks.

The car stopped before the veranda steps. Dreading to enter the Casa alone now, she descended slowly, expecting the police-chauffeur to drive away. Instead, he came round to stand beside her while he clapped his hands loudly.

The doors of the living room flew open. Paul and Eleanor appeared in them, silhouetted against the lights inside.

AT least Penny thought she saw them. But when next she opened her eyes she was in her own bed in her own room, and the sun was pouring through her windows. As she sat up a now familiar nose thrust her door open, and a spotless powder puff leaped up beside her.

Paul and Eleanor—the old, real Paul and Eleanor of India—followed to regard her with anxious smiles.

"I did see you!" Penny cried. "I wanted you so much I was afraid I'd dreamed you."

"Darling!" Eleanor sat down beside her and held her close. "You frightened us almost to death."

"Coming home at all hours, with a policeman in tow, to pass out in our arms!" Paul accused her. "And dirtier than the Baroneza ever was."

"Miss Penny is worse than the Baroneza, Mr. Paul." Delfina with a breakfast tray joined the spectators around the bed. "Every time she goes out she gets into trouble." She placed the tray beside Penny, picked up the Baroneza, and departed.

"Well!" Eleanor looked after her. "At least you've completely won our Delfina. Eat your breakfast now while we tell you our good news. Jay is safe in New York, safe and returning to Rio by plane within a week."

"Your Pepperpot located him in Bellevue Hospital," Paul added. "He'd been doped, Penny, half poisoned, the night you saw him. The police found him the day after you sailed, unconscious, in an abandoned cellar near the water front. An awful looking place. Pepperpot—what a name!—notified the U.E. and they had

him transferred to a private hospital."

"You saw him?"

"The poor thing is still addled," Paul exclaimed, shaking his head. "No my dear, we've not been to New York. Lieutenant Diego Machado saw to that."

"We've been held incommunicado in Rio since Wednesday morning," Eleanor explained. "We still are. Incommunicado, I mean."

"Mart worked the trick of getting us home," Paul was serious now. "He seemed to think you needed us more than the lieutenant, Penny."

Penny seized the head she had been pendulating from one to the other. "Perhaps I'm still out. Or maybe it's because I'm so glad to see you. And about Jay. But I can't make sense of what you say."

"Sit down, Paul. Eat your breakfast, Penny. I'll talk." Eleanor's voice was calm and firm. "It's a long story that begins with last Tuesday night when I made the mistake of asking Dr. Attilio to tell one of his diamond tales. And he made the mistake of perpetrating that awful yarn about Satan's Sixth Finger."

"That wasn't the first time he'd talked too much about it. According to Lieutenant Diego, when he first received the letter from the Bank of England, he was so excited he told more than Paul and me. Mr. Cochrane—What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Penny leaned back on her pillows and hid her hands under the covers to conceal their trembling. "Go on."

"Dr. Attilio told Mr. Cochrane and Wythe and perhaps others. I can't criticize him, though, for I told Jay—"

"I know about Jay going to London to get the diamond."

"Thank heaven! I hated to confess what a fool I'd been. Jay got the diamond to you, you to me, and I to Dr. Attilio—you know that too. And everything would have been all right if he hadn't told that impossible tale—"

"I'll finish," Paul interrupted. "Interested Brazilian officials learned of the stone too; I don't know how. But because of the war there's a strict censorship now—perhaps through that. At any rate, someone at that stupid dinner Tuesday night lost no time reporting that he suspected the stone had reached Dr. Attilio's hands. When we tried to take a plane Wednesday

morning he—this Diego Machado—was right there to see we didn't.

"He had some fool idea we were taking Satan's Sixth Finger back to New York to sell it. Anyway, he detained us—very comfortably, I must admit—and as a reward for our co-operation burned up the cables about Jay. That's our story in a nutshell."

Paul lifted the breakfast tray from Penny's lap and swung a chair round beside her. "Now I want to hear yours. What's this about your destroying Madge Cochrane's happy home?"

"Paul! You don't know what you're saying!"

"I don't? Listen, my child. Eleanor and I used every persuasion and argument we could devise to induce Lieutenant Diego to permit us to return home. Nothing doing. Then yesterday Mart turns the trick by warning him of threats Madge was making against Cock and against you. And pronto! We were raced home after dark last night—to find you gone and Delfina with a fine tale about your goings on."

"Delfina!"

"Delfina says Madge has telephoned the Casa every day, demanding to speak to Cock. Refused to believe he wasn't here. It seems he has not been in his office most of this past week——"

"And he had been here," Eleanor interposed. "You told Madge that yourself, didn't you, Penny?"

Penny lifted a stricken face. "It's too late! Mr. Cochrane is dead. Madge killed him—yesterday afternoon!"

Paul and Eleanor sat motionless, incredulous.

"It's true!" she cried. "I saw him. And Madge—she was in Dr. Attilio's chapel—she tried to shoot Mart, I thought." Penny burst into hysterical laughter. "It wasn't Mart. It was I. I—I saved my own life!"

Paul leaned over and shook her hard. "Stop that, Penny. This can't be true! You're raving!"

"Let her alone, Paul," Eleanor took Penny's cold hands in hers, chafed them gently. "Whatever has happened isn't your fault, Penny. Madge has been very strange—these last two years. She was once such a lovely woman, so very much admired, but she's been ill, very ill."

"Ill!" Paul snorted. "She's been hag-

ridden with jealousy! Of every woman Cock——" He strode about the room angrily. "But this can't be true, Eleanor. Penny's mistaken, deluded. Mart would have told me. Where is he, anyway?" He started for the door.

"You can't go out, remember, Paul. And you can't telephone," his wife warned. "Wait. It will do Penny good to get everything off her mind. Listen to her first."

But Paul did not need to wait or listen. Delfina, her eyes enormous with the news she bore, knocked and opened the door.

"Mr. Paul, José says they're telling at the gatehouse that Mr. Cochrane is dead. And Mr. Mart is coming up the back hill—running." As she started to withdraw Delfina added as an afterthought, "A man from the police is here to see Miss Penny. His name is Diego Machado."

She disappeared, Paul on her heels.

BUT when Eleanor and Penny arrived in the living room Dr. Attilio and Wythe were there also. Paul was busy pulling chairs into a semicircle about a cleared table near the couch. On it Lieutenant Diego arranged papers from a fat portfolio.

"Good!" he exclaimed as they entered. "Everyone is here. I am sorry to confine you to a house on such a beautiful afternoon. With your aid, however, I may be able to complete today our investigations into two complicated situations that concern you all. Then you will be free."

He waited until everyone was seated, their attention on him.

"Permit me first to clear away the minor difficulty that concerns Fabrica da Luz alone. For more than two years, as all but Miss Paget perhaps know, the Fabrica has suffered increasingly heavy losses in lamps. The police were as unsuccessful as Mr. Oliver to discover the man or men stealing them. Broken glass on the Fabrica walls, barbed wire, added watchmen, and other precautions were of no avail. Carton after carton left the Fabrica—until two months ago.

"By a coincidence the loss of lamps stopped with the departure of Mario Soares—the former superintendent of grounds—for New York. It was simple to assume, therefore, that his was the mind behind the thefts. But until last night we

could not prove two things. How he had been able to get such quantities of lamps outside the walls. How, when he got them out, he was able to dispose of them.

"With Mr. Oliver's co-operation, we placed a man here as superintendent of grounds when Mario Soares left. Pedro Martins. 'Mart,' as you call him. He was unsuccessful, too, until he came upon the long-forgotten entrance to the old subterraneo that served this Casa Grande a century or more ago. The tunnel led to Dr. Attilio's home. Oddly Dr. Sloane and Miss Paget found that entrance yesterday also.

"If they had not gone through the subterraneo in the dark they would have come upon the small cell Mart found. Long ago it was used for disciplining insubordinate slaves. In that cell they might have seen an ingeniously concealed entrance to a branch tunnel that led straight to the workshop of a young Syrian cabinetmaker."

Eleanor and Dr. Attilio looked up, startled, then at one another. But the detective did not pause.

"A very skilled cabinetmaker. His work was in great demand, particularly in Juiz de Fora, the industrial city on the plateau behind the Organ Mountains. As you know, it connects by train and highway with many points in the interior. Trucks came weekly to his door to receive carefully boxed chests and desks and other pieces. To receive also, we know now, U. E. lamps to be sold as contraband."

Lieutenant Diego took up two photographs from the table. "One of these men is now in custody. One is dead. You will look at these photographs, please, and tell me if you recognize one or both of them." He gave them to Paul, sitting on his left.

"That's Mario Soares," Paul said to the first. "This fellow looks familiar, but I don't know him." He passed the photographs to Eleanor.

"Mario," she agreed. "And the other—it's Aladdin Barbuk! But you can't mean—Why, he's a wonderful little man. He made my desk out of an old Brazilian chest I found. I've sent him many customers." She started to pass the photographs across Penny to Dr. Attilio.

"You will look at them also, Miss Paget," the detective directed.

"But she can't know them," Eleanor protested. "Mario was gone long before

she came, and Aladdin never left his shop."

"If you please, Miss Paget."

Penny took them with trembling fingers. She had already glimpsed the first photograph. At sight of the second she caught her breath.

"I—I know them both," she admitted slowly. "Though not by those names. This first one is Senhor Rodrigo who came down to Rio on the *Paraguay* with me. You know I know him, Lieutenant Diego. On the Avenida——"

The lieutenant said quickly, "And the other?"

Penny looked at Wythe, turned the photograph for him to see. "He—he said he was Hindu—a 'Mr. Mukerji.' He came here Thursday night to ask me to teach him English."

"He couldn't 'come here,' just like that!" Mart interjected. "You or Delfina had to telephone the gateman to admit him. I did my best with her, Paul," he added, "but she's impossible."

"You told me yourself it was all right to have people here," Penny retorted.

"Because I was under the impression you didn't know anyone to have!"

"Dr. Sloane, you will look at the photographs please." Lieutenant Diego's voice was peremptory, but his eyes amused.

Wythe took the pictures from Penny's hand. "Mario Soares. This one I don't know. I heard about Mukerji from Miss Paget but never saw him clearly enough to identify him." He offered the pictures to Dr. Attilio.

"Mario." Dr. Attilio turned from the first to the second quickly. "This is Aladdin, I regret to say. My wife will be desolate."

Mart took the photographs from him as he spoke and returned them to the detective. "I've already identified them for you, Lieutenant."

"Thank you. Since the entire contraband system rested on them you can now remove your broken glass and barbed wire, Mr. Oliver."

"With pleasure," Paul agreed. "But you only remove Mart over my dead body. Finder's keepers on Mart."

"Later I will learn that very concise phrase, Mr. Oliver. It seems to say much in little. But for the moment let us con-

sider the matter of the missing lamps closed."

"One moment." Dr. Attilio put up a restraining hand. "You say that one man is dead, the other under arrest. May we know——"

Lieutenant Diego did not answer at once. He looked from face to face about him, then at the two photographs. In the silence suspense seemed to lie heavily on the air. The detective appeared to feel it, deliberately to prolong and exploit it. In sudden decision he tossed the pictures to the table, spoke briskly.

"Certainly, Dr. Attilio. The dead man is—Mario Soares."

Instantly his manner changed, became hard and direct. "The theft of the lamps is of importance here merely as a doorstep to murder. To the murder of Mario Soares—and of three other men. Their deaths must be added to the long list of victims credited to Satan's Sixth Finger."

LIEUTENANT DIEGO prolonged suspense by adding more papers from his portfolio to the collection on the table. Watching him, Penny understood in her own rising apprehension the sensations of the others. All continued to sit quietly in their chairs, but a tightening of the atmosphere in the room, the concentration of their eyes betrayed their inner tensi-

This was not lessened when at some gesture from the lieutenant two khaki-clad police entered from the kitchen, followed by Delfina. She seated herself on a straight chair some distance from the circle and became an image in whose face only two dark eyes moved. One of the policemen produced a notebook and sat down behind the circle also, pencil poised. The other stationed himself beside the fireplace.

By that time the atmosphere was electric. It practically crackled when Lieutenant Diego tipped a leather case from his portfolio. Opening it, he placed Satan's Sixth Finger on the table before them. In the shadow he threw over it lay dull and inert, a rough and ugly thing and, perhaps because of the tradition linked with it, malignant.

The lieutenant's first words crackled too. "To save time I will sketch briefly my own part in this tragic story of the diamond."

Although he took up some typed sheets of paper he spoke without looking at them. "This is a copy of a letter received by Dr. Attilio de Sousa about a year ago from the Bank of England in London. From the time it came into my hands I naturally had an interest in Dr. Attilio's comings and goings. However, he made no change in his mode of life. It was only some weeks later when Mr. Jay Oliver applied for plane passport to Portugal, with visa to England and return, that we saw signs of a link between Dr. Attilio and his precious diamond.

"The applications were made through Mr. Emmett Cochrane, who explained he wished the young glassman to study new uses for glass under war conditions in England. We hastened to accommodate the president of so important an industry as the Universal Electric of Brazil.

"A month or so after Jay Oliver's departure Mario Soares applied for passport and plane passage to New York. His reason for going was simple and logical. He had saved sufficient money. Because of his connection with the Fabrica da Luz we made a record of his departure."

The detective turned to Dr. Attilio, sitting erect and stern in his chair. "You will confirm, will you not, Dr. Attilio, that Jay Oliver went to London in your behalf to secure the diamond?"

Dr. Attilio nodded his head gravely.

"And that in addition to various written credentials and authorizations, you gave him a letter to your kinsman, Dr. Rosario de Sousa, then in London, more or less as a refugee from Amsterdam?" When Dr. Attilio nodded again he asked, "Why?"

"Because it was necessary, senhor. As you must know, many proofs had to be provided the Bank of England before it could or would release so valuable a property. Dr. Rosario, as my kinsman, is also an heir to the diamond. He possesses, as I do, proof to his right in the form of a tiny key. Only these keys could unlock a small inner box contained in one or more larger ones. Either he or I had to be present in person with such a key."

Dr. Attilio moved to rise but, when the policeman stepped forward, sank back in his chair. "I was about to demonstrate what I am saying, Lieutenant," he explained with dignity.

Lieutenant Diego nodded. The policeman returned to his place. And Dr. Attilio, with an apologetic smile for Eleanor and Penelope, rose and removed his coat. Rolling back his left sleeve, he disclosed on his arm above the elbow a narrow circlet of gold. Penny's eyes widened as she saw hanging from it by a short gold chain a minute arm of gold and hand of silver.

Dr. Attilio removed the band and said directly to the detective, "In this little arm is a key to that inner box, similar to the one in Dr. Rosario's possession. You wish to see it?"

"If you please."

Dr. Attilio's hand closed over the little silver model. A swift movement and the silver hand separated from the gold arm. He moved forward to the table and tipped the arm. A tiny key, hardly more than half an inch long, spilled out.

"Excellent." Lieutenant Diego's voice did not change, but his eyes showed sudden interest. "May I ask you to demonstrate again—with this?"

From an envelope before him he took out a duplicate gold arm and silver hand. Penny and Wythe leaned forward at sight of it, recognizing it by the fragment of broken chain in its top.

THE detective spoke to Wythe. "Yes, I secured this and other things from your locked box this morning, Dr. Sloane. Later I will return the keys you lent me."

His face a study in conflicting emotions, Dr. Attilio continued to stand beside the table, looking at the second little arm on his hand. "May I ask where this was before it reached Dr. Sloane's private deposit box?" he asked coldly.

"In due time all will be explained, Dr. Attilio. You will open that, please?"

Without a word Dr. Attilio complied, laid arm, key, and hand on the table, and returned to his chair.

"Thank you," the detective said when he was seated. "You sent something else with Mr. Jay also?"

The ghost of a smile crossed the firm lips of the glassfactory director. "Some small rough pieces of glass."

"Good. That clarifies a confusing detail. I can now continue. Mr. Jay is a very intelligent young man. He mastered all

the difficulties of traveling from Lisbon into war-torn England and found Dr. Rosario in London. Shortly they went together to the Bank of England and—unfortunately—after various interviews received Satan's Sixth Finger. I say unfortunately, for it would have been wiser to have allowed it to remain there—at least until Mr. Jay was ready to return to Rio. Dr. Rosario, as a diamond expert, however, wished to study the stone at length. Interest overcame judgment."

Unexpectedly the detective swung to another subject. "In London, also, was another member of the Sousa family. The English would call him a black sheep. This was Avila de Sousa, the younger brother of Dr. Rosario. Some years ago he left Brazil hastily."

"Twenty years ago," Dr. Attilio said coldly. "Under suspicion of having killed a brother officer."

"Thank you. Avila de Sousa, however, was a very able man. He had done very well for himself in London as an importer of South American products. It was in his home Mr. Jay found the old diamond expert."

"Senhor Avila became very curious about the arrival of a young American at such a time in London. More so when he was given no information that satisfied him. He made it his concern to know what absorbed his brother and the young American so deeply. He even followed or had them followed on their visits to the Bank of England.

"Becoming suspicious, Dr. Rosario, to test him, hid a piece or two of the glass, which after some difficulty Senhor Avila found. Whether he had some knowledge of Satan's Sixth Finger and the glass suggested it to him, or whether it merely whetted his interest, we do not know. We do know he determined to possess whatever it was Dr. Rosario had. He succeeded to the point of making it impossible for Mr. Jay and the stone to leave England together.

"Again Dr. Rosario and Jay Oliver used the glass pieces. They mailed them and Satan's Sixth Finger in identical boxes to various addresses. By ordinary registered mail! That is right, Dr. Attilio?"

"Yes. They mailed one to me. I knew when it arrived that Jay could not return

to Rio, that he would go to New York and bring the stone down from there."

"Senhor Avila now put no obstacle in the way of Jay's departure. Nor Dr. Rosario's. In fact, he not only aided them to secure plane passages for New York from Lisbon, but accompanied them. And in New York Mario Soares—or Senhor Rodrigo, as Miss Paget knew him—quickly picked them up. How Mario knew they would arrive and when is a detail we have still to learn.

"Dr. Rosario, never a strong man, was now quite exhausted by strain and travel. Senhor Avila and Mario believed that if they could eliminate Jay—at least temporarily—they could deal with the old man. But first they had to locate the diamond. Jay, aware they were watching every step and word, made no effort to regain it.

"Shortly they relaxed their vigilance, first taking the rather stringent measure of half poisoning him. Unobserved, as he thought, he slipped away and called Miss Paget. Will you tell us what happened from then on, senhorita?"

AS Penny described events in New York from the time she heard Jay's voice on the telephone until she sailed for Rio the faces about her were concerned and interested. All except Mart's.

"Never a dull moment," was his comment when she finished. "Do go on. I see now why you went into Rio alone, why you scoured the byways for Syrian cabinet-makers."

Wythe turned on him angrily, thought better of it, gave Penny an expressive glance and a cigarette.

"With your permission, Senhor Mart," Lieutenant Diego interrupted ironically, "I will add a few words, and then perhaps Miss Paget will go on. I wish only to say that with the aid of some New York acquaintances Mario undertook to secure the diamond and dispose of Jay. And, incidentally, of Avila. It was arranged that Avila should fly to Barbados and there wait for Mario and the diamond. Neither of them, of course, intended to return to Brazil. In fact, it was Mario's idea to secure the diamond for himself and cross the border into Canada."

The detective's penetrating black eyes traveling slowly about the room shone for

an instant with satisfaction, but his smooth, clipped English never faltered.

"Mario did manage to dispose of Jay temporarily and locate the diamond. But he was unable to get it. Miss Paget had received it and concealed it in her hair. Though he bribed her nurse to secure it for him, the woman would not risk loss of her position, perhaps of her profession, to take it from Miss Paget by force. The diamond remained in Miss Paget's hair during her week in the hospital and throughout her voyage to Rio.

"Mario and Dr. Rosario also embarked with her on the *Paraguay*. Dr. Rosario naturally with reluctance. I understand he had Mario's word that if he sailed Jay would follow later. But again, although Mario was almost within reach of the stone, he could not secure it. Dr. Rosario refused to permit him to approach Miss Paget, nor would he make any effort himself.

"As Barbados drew nearer Mario grew more desperate. For personal reasons—one of them that he must now be suspected of the lamp thefts at the Fabrica—he had no desire to return to Brazil. He believed all was lost, that he had no other recourse than to leave the ship at Barbados and go back to the United States. To retain his hold on Satan's Sixth Finger, however, he persuaded or forced the old man, sick and weak, to go ashore with him.

"But in Barbados was Avila de Sousa, a man of stronger will and cunning than his own. The result was that Mario and Avila returned to the *Paraguay*, leaving Dr. Rosario dead in an isolated spot on the island. Now if that is all clear—"

Wythe leaned forward. "Perhaps I shouldn't interrupt, Lieutenant Diego. But the nature of my work makes me wonder—"

"Ah yes! The scientific mind, Dr. Sloane. You feel I should state my authorities, prove all I have said. And you have reason. My authorities are Mr. and Mrs. Oliver, cables from Jay Oliver, what I learned from you and Dr. Attilio last night, and some sketchy, un-co-ordinated notes from Aladdin Barbuk. Because Mario Soares is not here to give me the details necessary, I am counting on the assistance of this group now."

"Of course." Wythe settled back.

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

The detective turned to Penelope. "You will tell us what you heard and saw on the *Paraguay*, Miss Paget?"

Carefully and in detail Penny described the voyage. When she finished Eleanor turned on her reproachfully. "And you never told us, darling. No wonder you were exhausted."

"Listen to her!" Mart exclaimed. "I can hear her licking her chops from here. Don't let her deceive you, Dona Eleanor. Penny's made of India rubber."

"Senhor Mart!" Lieutenant Diego's voice was severe. "Miss Paget has contributed valuable information. We are all grateful to her. And there is much more to be said."

Silence fell quickly.

"I shall have to speak at this moment for Mrs. Cochrane," he continued. "And again my information is sketchy. She has told me her husband returned from the docks last Tuesday afternoon very much excited. For one thing, while watching the *Paraguay* berth, he recognized Mario Soares on an upper deck. He signaled to him and later, meeting him on the dock, accused him then and there of the Fabrica's losses. Mario first denied, then defied him to prove his charges. That made Mr. Cochrane very angry."

"At the same time, Mrs. Cochrane said, her husband seemed stirred over something else that had happened at the dock. He spoke of meeting Mrs. Oliver and Miss Paget there and was impatient to reach the Casa—to see Mr. Oliver."

Lieutenant Diego smiled oddly and paused to choose his words. "Mr. Cochrane, it seems, was an—ah—enthusiastic admirer of pretty young women. That may not surprise you who knew him. I confess, knowing him only by reputation as president of one of our leading industries in Brazil, it surprised me. But I—ah—have ample confirmation of his enthusiasm in reports I received this morning. Mrs. Cochrane, I believe, was not unaware of his—ah—tendencies and—"

"In other words, she was jealous," Paul interjected impatiently. "She was, very."

"Thank you. That is the word I wanted. When Mrs. Cochrane saw Miss Paget here at dinner last Tuesday night jealousy was the emotion she felt. She assumed

Miss Paget to be the cause of her husband's interest in whatever happened at the docking of the *Paraguay*. I believe she made her—ah—feeling clear later." He looked at Eleanor questioningly.

"Delfina can tell you," Eleanor said reluctantly, "if it is necessary for you to know, Lieutenant."

"She called here every day," Delfina assured him, without invitation. "Sometimes many times a day. Once she came. And she said terrible things about Miss Penny."

"That is all we need to remember at the moment." With evident relief the detective turned to another subject.

"At the dinner here on Tuesday night you all heard Dr. Attilio tell the legend of Satan's Sixth Finger, with certain embellishments of his own to suggest if such a stone existed he did not have it. You all, including Mr. Cochrane, drew your own conclusions. And you were not too surprised the next day to learn that Mr. Oliver and his wife had taken the first plane for New York. Unaware that his son was the reason for his haste, you assumed—as I did—he was going with or because of the diamond."

"Our Internal Revenue Bureau naturally takes a deep interest in so valuable a stone. It was impossible to permit them to depart until the diamond had been properly appraised and taxed here. I detained them—comfortably, I hope."

"Lieutenant Diego!" Dr. Attilio was on his feet with indignation. "I must protest against any suggestion that I intended to defraud—"

"I was afraid you would, Dr. Attilio." The lieutenant looked properly regretful. "Of course we know your honorable and meticulous character. And Mr. Oliver's too, I must hasten to add. But after all, a million-dollar diamond could cause many honorable men to do strange things. And there was no time to investigate. We had to act. Let us make our peace later and turn again to Avila and Mario."

"Relations between them were becoming very strained. Each—and rightly—suspected the other of wishing to secure the stone for himself alone. Now I must return to the *Paraguay* for a moment to explain something Miss Paget did not know. Shortly after leaving Barbados, Mario, as Dr. Rosario's 'secretary,' received a charge

slip and a copy of a wireless Dr. Rosario had sent to Dr. Attilio a few hours before. That wireless convinced him and Avila that the diamond had remained in New York. The reference to *Fouché*, they believed then, would tell where it could be found.

"Each determined to have the message for himself, discover the whereabouts of the stone, and leave the other to chew his nails. Separately they searched Miss Paget's cabin."

"But you said, Lieutenant," Mart pointed out, "Mario knew the stone was in Miss Paget's hair."

"Suspected is a better word. He did. But Avila, burned two or three times with those glass deceptions of Dr. Attilio's, believed that hair trick was a trick."

"The subtle Brazilian mind," Dr. Attilio murmured.

"Without message or diamond, they were desperate when the *Paraguay* docked," Lieutenant Diego went on, unheeding. "Then they met Mr. Cochrane. During the argument with Mario the U. E. *despachante*, Gonçalves, came up, and Mr. Cochrane stopped talking to give him Miss Paget's keys and instructions about her luggage."

"Avila, a successful businessman himself and—ah—not unlike Mr. Cochrane in various ways, immediately saw in your U. E. president an opportunity and an ally. And Mr. Cochrane, for some reason of his own, after some discussion, became very receptive to Avila's persuasion. They searched Miss Paget's luggage thoroughly, as she can doubtless testify."

"I can," Delfina announced. "I unpacked for Miss Penny."

THE detective stepped round the table to face them.

"We come now to last Wednesday evening. The Olivers apparently are on their way to New York. Miss Paget is alone in this Casa. And Avila—possibly Mario, also—has learned from Mr. Cochrane that the Olivers are taking the diamond back with them. It is my impression—though I cannot prove it—that Mr. Cochrane thought in this way to avoid trouble."

"Mr. Cochrane told me something that might help you," Penny said unexpectedly. "He said he was trying to avoid a million-

dollar-diamond scandal from involving the U.E. and Mr. Oliver and Dr. Attilio."

"So that's why he was so insistent on getting Mario behind bars!" Paul exclaimed. "The old fox! He never said a word about the diamond!"

"Avila and Mario merely became more frantic to secure the message about *Fouché*," the detective went on quickly. "For Wednesday evening, shortly after half-past nine, Avila entered the north gate of the Fabrica. With his military bearing and some sort of badge he managed to overwhelm the gateman and enter unannounced and unrecorded."

Lieutenant Diego threw out his slender hands dramatically. "Avila never returned to the north gate. Nor is he to be found in Rio. Last night, Dr. Sloane, you said you could give me proof of what happened to him."

Wythe hesitated. "Proof that a man was killed and his body destroyed on the Fabrica property, yes," he agreed slowly. "I cannot say it was Avila de Sousa."

"You forget. Miss Paget can."

As surprised glances turned on her Penny knew dismay. The presence of Avila's cane and tweeds in that little cell might not mean he was the murdered man after all. He had changed clothes with Dr. Rosario in Barbados. Perhaps he had again changed in that tunnel room.

Wythe's voice recalled her. "Penny, if you'll tell Lieutenant Diego what happened here from Wednesday night until you came to my office Thursday afternoon I'll carry on from there."

For the third time she was obliged to talk at length. Even Mart listened this time with the same concern and amazement as the rest. No one spoke when she finished. They simply looked at her until Wythe rose and, moving to the table, secured from Lieutenant Diego the two rough little chunks of glass and the Unprotecting Arm.

If they had listened to her with absorption they were even more spellbound by Wythe's clear explanations of his tests and deductions. Paul and Dr. Attilio, as glassmen, could not hear enough details. In spite of the detective's impatience to get on, they interrupted again and again with a heavy preponderance of questions. At last Wythe paused, took some papers

from a pocket, turned to look at Penny.

"To state it simply, my first test proved that calcium and phosphorus had been added to the lead-glass mixture in Pot Seven of Number Two Furnace between five o'clock Wednesday afternoon and eight o'clock Thursday morning. My second test proved they existed in the surface of the mixture in almost the exact molecular ratio in which calcium and phosphorus exist in human bone. My third test proved that some small pieces of gold had also found their way into the mixture.

"Working last night and this morning—under somewhat difficult conditions—I completed the fourth and last test. To prove whether the gold in the glass mixture and the gold in the little arm Miss Paget found Thursday morning were the same or different. My chemical analyses proved them to be identical."

"And that means——?" Lieutenant Diego prompted.

"That the body of the man Miss Paget saw on the steps of this Casa Wednesday night and the body of the man destroyed in Pot Seven later that same night were one and the same."

In the silence that followed Wythe laid the papers he was holding on the table beside the detective. "There is a complete report, including my analyses and deductions." He turned wearily and sank into his chair.

"It was Avila de Sousa," Dr. Attilio said heavily. "Only he could have taken the symbolic arm from Dr. Rosario's arm and placed it on his own. For Mario it would have had no significance."

"And your proof, Miss Paget?"

"I—I only know that the cane and gray tweeds this—Avila de Sousa wore on the *Paraguay* are lying in a little room off that tunnel."

Again that inexplicable sensation of fear seized her. In the pressure of the suddenly dead silence about her she could feel some threat, menace. She could not force her own eyes to lift to meet those she felt on her or force her lips to speak another word. Mart, on her left, released his breath slowly.

Dr. Attilio, motionless in his chair, became more immobile still, when the lieutenant stated rather than asked, "The deaths of Dr. Rosario de Sousa and Avila

de Sousa leave you, Dr. Attilio, sole possessor of Satan's Sixth Finger."

XXI

CHARACTERISTICALLY Lieutenant Diego swung to another topic. Picking up a flimsy from the table, he said briskly, "This is a copy of the wireless Dr. Rosario sent Dr. Attilio from the *Paraguay*." He read it clearly, dropped it on the table again. "Avila, Mario Soares, and I all made various efforts to secure the biography of Fouché it refers to from Miss Paget. Yes, Dr. Sloane?"

"You have keen eyes, Lieutenant. I thought I was concealing my surprise rather well. It was you who had my apartment, my car, and myself searched on São João's Eve?"

"Your apartment and your car, yes, Doctor. Yourself, no. To my regret. If I had made a personal search of your apartment and your car that evening I would also have followed you and Miss Paget to the summit of Corcovado if necessary. In that case the loss of an important witness might have been averted."

Penny gasped. "Mario! Mario Soares was in the car that fell."

"He and Aladdin Barbuk followed you up the mountain. Only Aladdin came down," the detective finished for him.

"Accident?" Wythe asked.

"No. Blackmail. On Wednesday night Mario entered the Fabrica by way of Barbuk's shop and the subterraneo, to reach the Casa and secure the *Fouché*. As he reached the hedge, he saw Avila entering the Casa gates, followed him and, as you know, killed him on the Casa steps.

"Aladdin either followed Mario or, by other espionage of his own, knew of Avila's murder. He thought that isolated mountainside a good place and time to force Mario to give him a larger share in the diamond. Mario refused. Aladdin, driving, sent the car over the road and down, leaped clear himself."

With those horrible cries on Corcovado echoing in her ears, Penelope turned to Wythe. To her surprise he was leaning back, quite at ease. So, too, was Mart. In fact, Mart looked positively smug with satisfaction. And Dr. Attilio, sitting with

lowered eyes, thoughtfully turning his ring round and round his finger, showed no regret for the former superintendent of grounds.

"Dr. Sloane," the lieutenant was saying, "I assume from the fact that Dr. Attilio, through you and Miss Paget, now has Dr. Rosario's message, that you know something about it. Will you tell us now?"

Concise Wythe concentrated the long tale of his and Penny's adventures with the message from the finding of Fouché's biography Thursday night until the moment Penny placed it in Dr. Attilio's hands. "I did not make a copy of it," he concluded. "And I see no reason for such a message nor all the trouble it has caused. It consists merely of measurements and recommendations about the stone."

"You also have read the message, Dr. Attilio?"

Dr. Attilio nodded. "Dr. Sloane is quite right. The message he read contains nothing more. I may say he had hidden it so ingeniously that it required more time to find than to read."

"Later I will ask for the book and a copy of the message. But the afternoon is coming to an end, and we have one more death to account for. Mr. Emmett Cochrane's."

Another, deeper silence fell over the room. The policeman, at a signal from Lieutenant Diego, went out by way of the foyer. They listened to his footsteps on the polished floor of the reception sala. A moment later listened to them returning, muffled by others.

Eleanor started as the stately figure of Dona Margherita appeared in the foyer archway. Her arm supported the small, shrinking form of Madge Cochrane. Behind them walked the policeman.

Everyone sprang up. But Lieutenant Diego motioned them back to their seats. Mart was placing chairs for Dona Margherita and Mrs. Cochrane beside the lieutenant's table.

Madge sat down quickly, her white, drawn face bent forward, her hands gripped tight on a handkerchief she had twisted into a rope. Dona Margherita stood a moment, her dark eyes sparkling with anger as she looked about the circle. They rested on her husband before, with

slow dignity, she seated herself beside Mrs. Cochrane.

Lieutenant Diego's voice was grave, sympathetic. "I understand how painful this hour must be—for all of you. We will be as brief as possible. Sunday afternoon Mr. Cochrane was killed by a shot from his own revolver. The nature of the wound precludes any possibility of suicide. Sunday evening—late—I found Mrs. Cochrane, the revolver still in her hand, in the chapel of Dr. Attilio. She denies, however, either the intention or the act."

HIS voice lost its note of understanding. "Senhores and senhoras, I only want the truth. I believe I can find it among you. Let us be as frank and explicit as we can. Dr. Sloane, I believe you were the last person to see Mr. Cochrane alive, were you not?"

"Until I know the time of his death I cannot answer that question with any certainty. I saw him, talked with him for a few minutes early Sunday afternoon. About half-past two, I think. In my office."

"By appointment?"

"Decidedly by accident. After all that had happened Saturday, particularly climbing Corcovado with Miss Paget, I could neither sleep nor rest on Sunday. Finally, after luncheon, I came out to my laboratories. I thought I might as well finish work on that fourth test. That is, after I had telephoned the Casa and learned from Delfina that Miss Paget was still sleeping."

He turned to Delfina. "Do you remember what time I called?"

"A little more than two hours," she answered promptly.

"It was considerably after that when I hung up the receiver. Delfina went into details about what she thought of that climb. Just as I hung up Mr. Cochrane appeared in my office doors."

Wythe's tone changed. "I was both surprised to see him and to see that he was very much upset about something. He had come out to talk with Mart about Mario being in Rio, he said. When he could not find Mart he stopped in to ask if I had seen him. I had not, and after a few minutes he left. I worked in the laboratories for an hour or more, then

locked up and went home. I had only been there a few minutes when Delfina phoned for me to come to the laboratories as quickly as possible. I took a taxi—I'd used buses for my earlier trip—and was back here before six."

"Did you mention this to Miss Paget or anyone?"

"That I'd seen Mr. Cochrane? No, I don't think so. It was just a chance meeting—no reason to remember or mention it."

"Sloane's right about times," Mart corroborated unexpectedly. "The gate records show he came in at two-five, left at three-thirty, returned at five-fifty-five. Mr. Cochrane checked through the north gate at two-eighteen. Mrs. Cochrane at three-fifteen."

Lieutenant Diego looked at Mrs. Cochrane. "Will you repeat what you told me last night, senhora? Or would you prefer to answer questions?"

"Questions," Mrs. Cochrane murmured without looking up.

"Good. Why did you come to Fabrica da Luz on Sunday afternoon?"

"My husband said he was coming here to see Wythe Sloane and Mart. I did not believe him. I thought—"

"He was coming to see Miss Paget?" the detective completed when her voice faltered.

She nodded slightly. "He—I thought he—came to see her every day. I wanted—to be sure—"

"And when you were sure what did you intend to do?"

"I didn't mind—so much—his interest in—in entertainers and others. But I couldn't bear it to be Eleanor's—Mrs. Oliver's friend."

Madge Cochrane lifted her head, flung the handkerchief from her. "I was jealous, frantic with jealousy. I thought if he were interested in someone like Miss Paget—I had really lost him. I wanted to be sure. If it were true I had decided to—to return to the States. To divorce him."

"You did not bring his revolver with you?"

"Of course not. He brought it himself. At least he always had it—in the pocket of his car."

"And you believe he had an appointment with Dr. Sloane?"

"He didn't say so. But he seemed to know Wythe would be at his laboratories."

"Perhaps he called my apartment, asked my maid," Wythe suggested.

"And when you entered the north gate what did you do, senhora?"

"I came out by a taxi but dismissed it at the gate." Madge Cochrane's voice was low but steadier now. "I walked from the north gate on the pavement past the laboratories and warehouses and came up the back hill road to the rear Casa gates. The front driveway is too steep for me and—I didn't want to be seen—at first. Near the rear gates I met Delfina, and she convinced me my husband was not in the Casa. She said that except for a few minutes one morning he had never been there."

"And then?" prompted Lieutenant Diego.

"I started back the way I had come. But I was awfully tired. And I dreaded returning to Rio alone. I thought perhaps I could find my husband and looked around for his car. From the back road I could see it parked between a warehouse and the laboratories. I started down the hill toward it. Then I saw Mart—"

She stopped uneasily. "He was running. Toward his shops. And something about him or the way he was running frightened me. My husband had come out to see him and—they didn't get on together very well—"

"And then?"

"I ran, too. To the warehouse where the car was. I tried all the doors and pounded on them, but I could hear nothing. I didn't know what to do. The laboratory doors had been closed when I passed, but I went there anyway. They were still closed, but when I pounded on them one opened. A little."

TEARS began to roll down Madge Cochrane's cheeks. She seemed unaware of them and continued to look at the lieutenant. With a gesture he stopped Dona Margherita's attempt to give her a handkerchief.

"I pushed it a little more. And saw my husband. Lying on the floor. Not in the office. Just inside the laboratories. I—I went in. He was dead. And that

revolver was near his hand. But I don't remember picking it up. I don't remember anything except standing there with everything broken and heaped around."

"You have been very good to tell this so clearly, Mrs. Cochrane. Rest now for a time. Mart will tell us why he was running, why he found you in the laboratories."

Mart spoke immediately and with something of the clipped restraint of the lieutenant. "I was running because I was mad. Mr. Cochrane promised, by one o'clock, to be at the north gate. And after hours of waiting for him I find his car beside the warehouse! 'He's gone to my office,' I think—as if I'd wait there for him until almost four o'clock.

"I ran over but he wasn't there. So I smoked a cigarette to cool down. Then I started back for the gatehouse to leave a message for him that I wasn't playing any more. As I passed the laboratories I saw one of the doors open. 'He might be there,' I think. Doc Sloane often works Sundays and evenings. What I find is the place a shambles and in the midst of it Mrs. Cochrane standing over her husband, a gun in her hand. She acted like a frozen woman. Couldn't move, couldn't speak. I got her out, locked up with my own keys, and took her to Dona Margherita. *Mamãe* wasn't home."

He looked at Dr. Attilio as if for confirmation and rushed on. "It was almost four-thirty then. It is almost five when I arrive back at the laboratories—just in time to see Miss Paget racing up the hill, screaming for Delfina. 'She couldn't have been in the laboratories,' I think, 'but she must have discovered something.' And I didn't want that body found on the premises. ('I'm already a U.E. man enough not to want scandal to touch the place.') And I didn't dare move it far. Then I remembered the discovery I made Saturday afternoon."

Mart grinned sardonically. "My discovery was the reason why Mr. Cochrane condescended to join my humble self. Saturday morning I'd burned over the dry grass above the laboratories. Late that afternoon, kicking over the ground to see that my men had done a good job, I came on that tanque full of junk. 'Mario,' I

say to myself, 'was the kind of superintendent to let that stuff stay there forever.' But not me! I started to heave it out and discovered it to be the neatest bit of camouflage of all time. It concealed a trap door.

"I explored the subterraneo beneath it as far as a stone-walled cell. There's a false door there and behind that door a passage that actually contained some U.E. cartons. That passage was short and led to Barbuk's shop. Mr. Cochrane had been pressing me for proof against Mario. Here it was! I made a date with him by phone to meet me in the Fabrica at one o'clock on Sunday. We thought no one would be here and we could explore—"

"Yes, yes," Lieutenant Diego interrupted impatiently, "but the point is—"

"The point is that the tanque entrance is just a few steps from the laboratories. I carried Mr. Cochrane's body to that cell."

"That is all you have to say?"

"Unless you'd be interested to know I was just coming out of the subterraneo again—about six o'clock—when Dr. Sloane came running through the north gate and Miss Paget down the hill. I ducked back until they went into the laboratories."

"And then?"

Mart shifted position uncomfortably.

"Well, then I sort of stood by—to see what they'd do. They remained inside for hours. When they came out they went straight to the tanque—as if they'd always known about it—"

"You followed us," Penny accused coldly.

"For a time, yes. But you remained so long in that cell I thought you'd found the concealed door and gone into the branch tunnel. I'd promised Dr. Attilio to return as soon as I could to decide what to do next about Mrs. Cochrane. So I left the subterraneo, drove over to his home. I was talking with him and Mrs. Cochrane when you began to hammer on that door. I left before he admitted you and returned—"

"We'll leave you for a moment," the detective interrupted, "and turn to Dr. Sloane and Miss Paget. Their story should fit in here."

FOR the next half-hour Lieutenant Diego led Penny and Wythe back and forth over their experiences in the laboratories, their discovery of the subterraneo, their arrival in Dr. Attilio's library. Again and again he harped back to one question. Why had they concealed from Dr. Attilio that they had stopped in the little cell, seen Mr. Cochrane's body there?

"Oh, make your own interpretation," Wythe finally said wearily.

"You've said you didn't suspect Dr. Attilio, Wythe," Paul pointed out. "If you think Mart killed Mr. Cochrane, was spying on you, say so. Mart can defend himself later. If it's Penny you're trying to shield, forget it. Lieutenant Diego's being as considerate as he can. The least we can do is to tell him anything we know or even suspect."

Wythe admitted reluctantly, "I couldn't forget then—in the tunnel—that it was Penny who discovered Mr. Cochrane's body in my laboratories. That it was Penny who led me straight to the tanque, who insisted we explore the subterraneo though it was late and about to rain. Penny who found that cell and Cochrane's body. Perhaps it was the sight of my ruined laboratories, perhaps the accumulation of everything that had happened which got me down. I couldn't be sure she hadn't led me there deliberately."

"Wythe!" Penny turned on him incredulously.

He smiled wryly. "If Paul wants the whole truth I even suspected when I heard someone in the passage behind us that you had led me into a trap."

"A trap! You? How could I?"

"Why not?" Mart's voice was harsh with impatience. "He's in a trap now. And knows it!"

Wythe leaped to his feet. Mart tilted back in his chair, his lips stretched in a provoking grin, but his eyes alert.

"Sit down, please, Dr. Sloane," Lieutenant Diego said quietly.

"I shall not sit down, Lieutenant. I've had enough." Wythe took an angry stride toward the doors. The policeman was there before him.

"What is this? I've told you all I know!"

"Not quite all, Dr. Sloane. I had hoped

to carry this outline of events to a conclusion. But Mart's impatience anticipated me."

"What do you mean, Lieutenant?"

"That you haven't told us why you sent Mario Soares to New York. How Mario knew Jay Oliver and Dr. Rosario would arrive there. Why Mario knew to sail on the *Paraguay* with Miss Paget."

"How can I answer such fantastic questions?"

"Suppose I tell you we know you learned her son's plans from Mrs. Oliver. That you knew of the close friendship between the Olivers and Miss Paget. That when the cable arrived announcing her coming to Rio, you suspected she was bringing Satan's Sixth Finger and cabled Mario.

"You began to suspect Mario of trickery, didn't you, when he didn't report to you on his return to Rio? And when your own experiments proved Miss Paget's belief that a man had been killed and his body destroyed in the glass factory, you suspected Mario as the murderer, didn't you?"

"Interesting. Very. And whom did I think he killed, Lieutenant Diego? I knew Mario as Mr. Oliver, Dr. Attilio, everyone knew him, merely as the superintendent of grounds."

"You also knew him as the man responsible for the lamp thefts, didn't you? Wasn't that knowledge the whip you held over him to force him to do your bidding? The only thing you did not know was his way of getting the lamps outside the walls. But you believed if he knew a secret way out he also knew a way in!

"Suppose I tell you, Dr. Sloane," the detective was continuing, "that your excellent work in making the analyses and deductions about the death of the man we know now to have been Avila de Sousa, and in discovering, deciphering, and guarding the message from Dr. Rosario was not the work of a disinterested friend either of Miss Paget or justice. It was a skillful and determined effort to be prepared to protect yourself."

When Wythe remained silent the detective added slowly, "Suppose I tell you the message you guarded so effectively was not the real message—that it merely served to conceal another. Only darkness

was necessary to reveal the first. But darkness plus heat had to be applied to uncover the real warning Dr. Rosario sent his kinsman."

"I would remind you that I am a chemist, Lieutenant." Wythe smiled then. "Such a thing is impossible."

"Dr. Rosario was also a chemist. Dr. Attilio is a chemist. Listen. Here is the real message."

THE detective slipped a sheet of paper from the bottom of a pile and read:

With misgivings I send this to warn you of a Mario Soares whom you know. Avila followed us to New York. M. S. was there. They joined to keep us under constant surveillance. Jay has disappeared. So, too, has Avila. I fear for my own life and have agreed to debark at Barbados and return to New York. Guard yourself against M. S. if the stone reaches you safely. Even more against a man more dangerous still whom M. S. fears and will betray if he can. I do not know this man's name, but he is close to Jay's family, for he learns and anticipates our every move. From New York I will write you fully.

As the detective finished reading Wythe leaned forward to crush out his cigarette, leaned back.

"You are a very clever man, Dr. Sloane. You see at once that the message does not mention your name. And you have covered every action well under guise of assisting or protecting Miss Paget. Yet it is true, is it not, Mrs. Oliver, that you repeated to Dr. Sloane news you received from your son?"

Eleanor nodded slowly.

"And to no one else?"

She shook her head.

"You forget, perhaps, Lieutenant," Wythe pointed out, "your own excellent censorship—"

"I forget nothing, Doctor, not even a detail that Mrs. Cochrane mentioned last night but neglected to repeat today. That shot from her husband's gun in Dr. Attilio's library was intended for you, senhor. Watching you through the chapel gates, Mrs. Cochrane remembered the quarrel between you and her husband last

Saturday afternoon when he refused to accept your resignation until Mr. Oliver returned. She remembered her husband's suspicion late Saturday when Mart called to say he had found Mario's secret exit so near your laboratories."

"Mr. Cochrane's sense of suspicion was well developed, I admit, Lieutenant Diego," Eleanor broke in, "but that seems very farfetched to me."

"Not when you consider the relation of warehouse to laboratories and laboratories to subterraneo, senhora. It would have been difficult to remove large lamp cartons from warehouse to subterraneo directly. They either had to be carried in front of the laboratories or back of them. A method dangerous indeed, considering that watchmen ranged the grounds at all hours. But to carry the cartons through the passage between warehouse and laboratories and through them to the tanque was very simple. At night the tanque, high above the heads of anyone on the pavement, cannot be seen, and that section of hillside was never patrolled, I believe."

Wythe laughed shortly. "Are you accusing me of petty thievery now?"

"Not at all. I suggest that when you discovered Mario to be using your laboratories for his thefts you threatened exposure unless he did as you asked. You thought him too dumb—as he was—to dare to steal the diamond for himself. But I see your purpose. You are diverting me from Mrs. Cochrane's attempted vengeance."

"Vengeance! Madge Cochrane?"

Mrs. Cochrane looked up, rose uncertainly. "I did try to kill you, Wythe. You deserved it. I can't prove it, but I'm sure you killed my husband when he accused you—"

Wythe turned to Paul. "Can you sit there and hear these charges without a word? You know me and my work."

Paul looked back at him steadily. "If you are innocent you can prove it, Wythe. If you are guilty Lieutenant Diego must prove it."

"How can I prove it?" Wythe demanded. "Mario Soares is dead. Mr. Cochrane is dead. And this Dr. Rosario. They condemn me with dead men's words."

"One moment, Dr. Sloane. I hoped

to permit you to convict yourself with your own words. I think you have. Why, as Miss Paget asked, should you suspect a trap if you are innocent? However, I can produce a living man."

The policeman was already hurrying toward the veranda doors. Shortly he reappeared on the veranda followed by three men. Two wore khaki uniforms. The third, slender and dapper in civilian dress, walked between them. They marched into the living room to stop inside the doors.

"Mario Soares did not die on Corcovado, Dr. Sloane. Aladdin Barbuk was the man who went over the precipice in a car."

Wythe started up, took a step forward. Then as a slow, evil smile moved on Mario's red lips, in his black eyes, he stopped short. For a moment Wythe looked about the room, reading in each face understanding of that smile.

With a shrug he turned and silently walked to the table. Unrestrained by the detective, he took up Satan's Sixth Finger. No one stirred as he turned it slowly in his own long fingers, closed his hands over it for an instant.

"To make sure its tradition does not fail me," he said coolly. "I have no desire to live longer—a poor man."

He placed the diamond on the table and looked at the detective. "Because of that smirking fool whom you led me to believe dead, I am caught—trapped. And at your disposal, Lieutenant. It is true I wanted the diamond. It is true I killed Mr. Cochrane when he accused me of aiding Mario in the lamp thefts and to steal the stone. But I killed him in self-defense. He tried to force a confession from me with his gun. I took it from him, shot him. I knew the diamond had escaped me, that two men had died because of it. But with Mr. Cochrane and Mario dead, I thought myself clear."

Paul was on his feet, staring at Wythe. "But, Wythe, whoever killed Cock destroyed your laboratories. You couldn't—wouldn't—" He stopped short.

Wythe's cool, controlled face was draining slowly white. Suddenly it suffused with rage, and he swung round on the detective.

"You didn't know!" he shouted. "You didn't really know! I destroyed my laboratories because I thought no one would believe I'd do that. And no one did believe it! You couldn't have proved—"

"No," Lieutenant Diego told him evenly. "We couldn't have proved you killed Mr. Cochrane. Even Mario could have proved you guilty only of an attempt to steal the diamond. If you had not touched Satan's Sixth Finger, Dr. Sloane, we might still believe Mrs. Cochrane killed her husband. You lost your head, senhor, when you took that stone in your hands."

He motioned to the policemen. Wythe saw the gesture, went to meet them. Without a backward glance he strode ahead of them through the doors.

In silence, incredulous, stricken, those left behind remained seated, looking after him. Lieutenant Diego quietly replaced his papers, the chunks of glass and other objects in his portfolio. He left the diamond until the last. For a moment he looked at it somberly, as if reluctant himself to touch it. Then he swept it swiftly into its case and into the portfolio.

With a bow he turned for the doors. Paul rose and went with him.

The others rose, too, to leave. Only Penny remained in her chair. Mart, not far away, stood watching her, his eyes neither derisive nor sardonic now.

After a time he moved to her side, placed a hand on her shoulder. "Don't take this too hard," he said gently. "Doc Attilio would say this was another case of Americans wanting more than they have. Sometimes they get it. Sometimes—they don't."

"You knew—all the time?"

"Suspected. No one knew."

Penny turned from him. "Oh, go away. I never want to see you again!"

"Don't say that, Penny. Please. I won't play American any more. And I'm rather nice as a Brazilian. Now this is over, I'll show you Rio. One beautiful day, all Brazil. Make you forget—"

"One day? You mean you, too, want—?"

"More than I have? No. I want you, my *Pennyzinha*. Now I have the chance to make you want me. You don't now. But you will. One beautiful day—"

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